THE TWO DESTINIES

WILKIE COLLINS

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THE

TWO DESTINIES

A ROMANCE

BY

WILKIE COLLINS

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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THE TWO DESTINIES.

CHAPTER I.

THE CATS.

Miss Dunross had so completely perplexed me, that I was at a loss what to say next.

To ask her plainly why it was necessary to keep the room in darkness while she remained in it, might prove (for all I knew to the contrary) to be an act of downright rudeness. To venture on any general expression of sympathy with her, knowing absolutely nothing of the circumstances, might place us both in an embarrassing position at the outset of our acquaintance. The one

thing I could do was to beg that the present arrangement of the room might not be disturbed, and to leave her to decide as to whether she should admit me to her confidence or exclude me from it, at her own sole discretion.

She perfectly understood what was going on in my mind. Taking a chair at the foot of the bed, she told me simply and unreservedly the sad secret of the darkened room.

'If you wish to see much of me, Mr. Germaine,' she began, 'you must accustom yourself to the world of shadows in which it is my lot to live. Some time since, a dreadful illness raged among the people in our part of this island; and I was so unfortunate as to catch the infection. When I recovered—no! "Recovery" is not the right word to use—let me say, when I escaped death, I found myself afflicted by a nervous malady which has defied medical help from

that time to this. I am suffering (as the doctors explain it to me) from a morbidly sensitive condition of the nerves near the surface to the action of light. If I were to draw the curtains, and look out of that window, I should feel the acutest pain all over my face. If I covered my face, and drew the curtains with my bare hands, I should feel the same pain in my hands. You can just see perhaps that I have a very large and very thick veil on my head. I let it fall over my face and neck and hands, when I have occasion to pass along the corridors, or to enter my father's study—and I find it protection enough. Don't be too ready to deplore my sad condition, sir! I have got so used to living in the dark that I can see quite well enough for all the purposes of *my* poor existence. I can read and write in these shadows—I can see you, and be of use to you in many little ways, if you will let me.

There is really nothing to be distressed about. My life will not be a long one—I know and feel that. But I hope to be spared long enough to be my father's companion through the closing years of his life. Beyond that, I have no prospect. In the meanwhile, I have my pleasures; and I mean to add to my scanty little stock the pleasure of attending on you. You are quite an event in my life. I look forward to reading to you and writing for you, as some girls look forward to a new dress, or a first ball. Do you think it very strange of me to tell you so openly just what I have in my mind? I can't help it! I say what I think to my father, and to our poor neighbours hereabouts—and I can't alter my ways at a moment's notice. I own it when I like people; and I own it when I don't. I have been looking at you while you were asleep; and I have read your face as I might read a book. There are signs of sorrow on

your forehead and your lips which it is strange to see in so young a face as yours. I am afraid I shall trouble you with many questions about yourself when we become better acquainted with each other. Let me begin with a question, in my capacity as nurse. Are your pillows comfortable? I can see they want shaking up. Shall I send for Peter to raise you? I am unhappily not strong enough to be able to help you in that way. No? You are able to raise yourself? Wait a little. There! Now lie back—and tell me if I know how to establish the right sort of sympathy between a tumbled pillow and a weary head.'

She had so indescribably touched and interested me, stranger as I was, that the sudden cessation of her faint sweet tones affected me almost with a sense of pain. In trying (clumsily enough) to help her with the pillows, I accidentally touched her hand. It

felt so cold and so thin, that even the momentary contact with it startled me. I tried vainly to see her face, now that it was more within reach of my range of view. The merciless darkness kept it as complete a mystery as ever. Had my curiosity escaped her notice? Nothing escaped her notice! Her next words told me plainly that I had been discovered.

'You have been trying to see me,' she said. 'Has my hand warned you not to try again? I felt that it startled you when you touched it just now.'

Such quickness of perception as this was not to be deceived; such fearless candour demanded as a right a similar frankness on my side. I owned the truth, and left it to her indulgence to forgive me.

She returned slowly to her chair at the foot of the bed.

'If we are to be friends,' she said, 'we

must begin by understanding one another. Don't associate any romantic ideas of invisible beauty with *me*, Mr. Germaine. I had but one beauty to boast of before I fell ill—my complexion—and that has gone for ever. There is nothing to see in me now, but the ruin of what was once a woman.'

She stopped for a moment. I could only judge of the effort which it cost her to say those sad words, by the altered tones of her voice as she spoke. They told me plainly that she had paused, not to consider what she should say next, but to control emotions which shook her self-possession as nothing had shaken it yet.

'I don't say this to distress you,' she went on; 'I say it to reconcile you to the darkness as a perpetual obstacle, so far as your eyes are concerned, between you and me. Make the best instead of the worst of your strange position here. It offers you a new

sensation to amuse you while you are ill. You have a nurse who is an impersonal creature—a shadow among shadows; a voice to speak to you, and a hand to help you, and nothing more. Enough of myself!' she exclaimed, rising and changing her tone. 'What can I do to amuse you?' She considered a little. 'I have some odd tastes,' she resumed; 'and I think I may entertain you if I make you acquainted with one of them. Are you like most other men, Mr. Germaine? Do you hate cats?'

The question startled me. However, I could honestly answer that, in this respect at least, I was not like other men.

'To my thinking,' I added, 'the cat is a cruelly misunderstood creature—especially in England. Women, no doubt, generally do justice to the affectionate nature of cats. But the men treat them as if they were the natural enemies of the human race. The

men drive a cat out of their presence if it ventures up stairs, and set their dogs at it if it shows itself in the street—and then they turn round and accuse the poor creature (whose genial nature must attach itself to something) of being only fond of the kitchen!'

The expression of these unpopular sentiments appeared to raise me greatly in the estimation of Miss Dunross.

'We have one sympathy in common, at any rate,' she said. 'Now I can amuse you! Prepare for a surprise.'

She drew her veil over her face as she spoke, and, partially opening the door, rang my hand-bell. Peter appeared, and received his instructions.

'Move the screen,' said Miss Dunross. Peter obeyed; the ruddy firelight streamed over the floor. Miss Dunross proceeded with her directions. 'Open the door of the

cats' room, Peter; and bring me my harp. Don't suppose that you are going to listen to a great player, Mr. Germaine,' she went on, when Peter had departed on his singular errand, 'or that you are likely to see the sort of harp to which you are accustomed, as a man of the modern time. I can only play some old Scotch airs; and my harp is an ancient instrument (with new strings)—an heirloom in our family, some centuries old. When you see my harp, you will think of pictures of Saint Cecilia—and you will be treating my performance kindly if you will remember, at the same time, that I am no Saint!'

She drew her chair into the firelight; and sounded a whistle which she took from the pocket of her dress. In another moment, the lithe and shadowy figures of the cats appeared noiselessly in the red light, answering their mistress's call. I could just count

six of them, as the creatures seated themselves demurely in a circle round the chair. Peter followed with the harp, and closed the door after him as he went out. The streak of daylight being now excluded from the room, Miss Dunross threw back her veil, and took the harp on her knee; seating herself, I observed, with her face turned away from the fire.

'You will have light enough to see the cats by,' she said, 'without having too much light for *me*. Firelight does not give me the acute pain which I suffer when daylight falls on my face—I feel a certain inconvenience from it, and nothing more.'

She touched the strings of her instrument—the ancient harp, as she had said, of the pictured Saint Cecilia; or rather, as I thought, the ancient harp of the Welsh Bards. The sound was at first unpleasantly high in pitch, to my untutored ear. At the

opening notes of the melody—a slow wailing dirge-like air—the cats began the performance by walking round their mistress. Now they followed each other singly; now, at a change in the melody, they walked two and two; and, now again, they separated into divisions of three each, and circled round the chair in opposite directions. The music quickened, and the cats quickened their pace with it. Faster and faster the notes rang out, and faster and faster in the ruddy firelight, the cats like living shadows whirled round the still black figure in the chair, with the ancient harp on its knee. Anything so weird, wild, and ghostlike I never imagined before even in a dream! The music changed, and the whirling cats began to leap. One perched itself at a bound on the pedestal of the harp. Four sprang up together, and assumed their places, two on each of her shoulders. The last and

smallest of the cats took the last leap, and lighted on her head! There the six creatures kept their positions, motionless as statues! Nothing moved but the wan white hands over the harp-strings; no sound but the sound of the music stirred in the room. Once more the melody changed. In an instant, the six cats were on the floor again, seated round the chair as I had seen them on their first entrance; the harp was laid aside; and the faint sweet voice said quietly, 'I am soon tired—my cats must conclude their performances to-morrow.'

She rose, and approached the bedside.

'I leave you to see the sunset through your window,' she said. 'From the coming of the darkness to the coming of breakfast-time, you must not count on my services—I am taking my rest. I have no choice but to remain in bed (sleeping when I can) for twelve hours or more. The long repose

seems to keep my life in me. Have I and my cats surprised you very much? Am I a witch; and are they my familiar spirits? Remember how few amusements I have, and you will not wonder why I devote myself to teaching these pretty creatures their tricks, and attaching them to me like dogs! They were slow at first, and they taught me excellent lessons of patience. Now, they understand what I want of them, and they learn wonderfully well. How you will amuse your friend, when he comes back from fishing, with the story of the young lady who lives in the dark, and keeps a company of performing cats! I shall expect *you* to amuse *me* to-morrow—I want you to tell me all about yourself, and how you came to visit these wild islands of ours. Perhaps, as the days go on, and we get better acquainted, you will take me a little more into your confidence, and tell me the true meaning of that

story of sorrow which I read on your face while you were asleep? I have just enough of the woman left in me to be the victim of curiosity, when I meet with a person who interests me. Good-bye till to-morrow! I wish you a tranquil night, and a pleasant waking. Come, my familiar spirits—Come my cat-children! it's time we went back to our own side of the house.'

She dropped the veil over her face—and, followed by her train of cats, glided out of the room.

Immediately on her departure, Peter appeared, and drew back the curtains. The light of the setting sun streamed in at the window. At the same moment, my travelling companion returned in high spirits, eager to tell me about his fishing in the lake. The contrast between what I saw and heard now, and what I had seen and heard only a few minutes since, was so extraordinary and so

startling that I almost doubted whether the veiled figure with the harp, and the dance of cats, were not the fantastic creations of a dream. I actually asked my friend whether he had found me awake or asleep when he came into the room!

Evening merged into night. Mr. Dunross duly made his appearance, to receive the latest news of my health. He spoke and listened absently, as if his mind was still preoccupied by his studies—except when I referred gratefully to his daughter's kindness to me. At her name his faded blue eyes brightened; his drooping head became erect; his sad subdued voice strengthened in tone.

'Do not hesitate to let her attend on you,' he said. 'Whatever interests or amuses her, lengthens her life. In *her* life is the breath of mine. She is more than my daughter—she is the guardian-angel of the house; go where she may, she carries the air of Heaven

with her. When you say your prayers, sir, pray God to leave my daughter here a little longer.'

He sighed heavily; his head dropped again on his breast—he left me.

The hour advanced; the evening meal was set by my bedside. Silent Peter, taking his leave for the night, developed into speech. 'I sleep next door,' he said. 'Ring when you want me.' My travelling-companion, taking the second bed in the room, reposed in the happy sleep of youth. In the house, there was dead silence. Out of the house, the low song of the night-wind, rising and falling over the lake and the moor, was the one sound to be heard. So the first day ended in the hospitable Shetland house.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREEN FLAG.

'I CONGRATULATE you, Mr. Germaine, on your power of painting in words. Your description gives me a vivid idea of Mrs. Van Brandt.'

'Does the portrait please you, Miss Dunross?'

'May I speak as plainly as usual?'

'Certainly!'

'Well, then, plainly, I don't like your Mrs. Van Brandt.'

Ten days had passed; and thus far Miss Dunross had made her way into my confidence already!

By what means had she induced me to

trust her with those secret and sacred sorrows of my life which I had hitherto kept for my mother's ear alone? I can easily recall the rapid and subtle manner in which her sympathies twined themselves round mine—but I fail entirely to trace the infinite gradations of approach, by which she surprised and conquered my habitual reserve. The strongest influence of all, the influence of the eye, was not hers. When the light was admitted into the room, she was shrouded in her veil. At all other times, the curtains were drawn, the screen was before the fire—I could see dimly the outline of her face, and I could see no more. The secret of her influence was perhaps partly attributable to the simple and sisterly manner in which she spoke to me, and partly to the indescribable interest which associated itself with her mere presence in the room. Her father had told me that she 'carried the air of Heaven with her.' In my

experience, I can only say that she carried something with her which softly and inscrutably possessed itself of my will, and made me as unconsciously obedient to her wishes as if I had been her dog. The love-story of my boyhood, in all its particulars, down even to the gift of the green-flag; the mystic predictions of Dame Dermody; the loss of every trace of my little Mary of former days; the rescue of Mrs. Van Brandt from the river; the apparition of her in the summer-house; the after-meetings with her in Edinburgh and in London; the final parting which had left its mark of sorrow on my face—all these events, all these sufferings, I confided to her as unreservedly as I have confided them to these pages. And the result, as she sat by me in the darkened room, was summed up, with a woman's headlong impetuosity of judgment, in the words I have just written—'I don't like your Mrs. Van Brandt!'

'Why not?' I asked.

She answered instantly, 'Because you ought to love nobody but Mary.'

'But Mary has been lost to me since I was a boy of thirteen.'

'Be patient—and you will find her again. Mary is patient—Mary is waiting for you. When you meet her, you will be ashamed to remember that you ever loved Mrs. Van Brandt—you will look on your separation from that woman as the happiest event of your life. I may not live to hear of it—but *you* will live to own that I was right.'

Her perfectly-baseless conviction that time would yet bring about my meeting with Mary, partly irritated, partly amused me.'

'You seem to agree with Dame Dermody,' I said. 'You believe that our two destinies are one. No matter what time may elapse, or what may happen in the time, you believe

my marriage with Mary is still a marriage delayed, and nothing more?'

'I firmly believe it.'

'Without knowing why—except that you dislike the idea of my marrying Mrs. Van Brandt?'

She knew that this view of her motive was not far from being the right one—and womanlike, she shifted the discussion to new ground.

'Why do you call her Mrs. Van Brandt?' she asked. 'Mrs. Van Brandt is the namesake of your first love. If you are so fond of her, why don't you call her Mary?'

I was ashamed to give the true reason—it seemed so utterly unworthy of a man of any sense or spirit. Noticing my hesitation, she insisted on my answering her; she forced me to make my humiliating confession.

'The man who has parted us,' I said, 'called her Mary. I hate him with such a

jealous hatred that he has even disgusted me with the name! It lost all its charm for me when it passed *his* lips.'

I had anticipated that she would laugh at me. No! She suddenly raised her head as if she was looking at me intently in the dark.

'How fond you must be of that woman!' she said. 'Do you dream of her now?'

'I never dream of her now.'

'Do you expect to see the apparition of her again?'

'It may be so—if a time comes when she is in sore need of help, and when she has no friend to look to but me.'

'Did you ever see the apparition of your little Mary?'

'Never!'

'But you used once to see her—as Dame Dermody predicted—in dreams?'

'Yes—when I was a lad.'

'And in the after-time, it was not Mary, but Mrs. Van Brandt who came to you in dreams—who appeared to you in the spirit, when she was far away from you in the body? Poor old Dame Dermody! She little thought in her lifetime, that her prediction would be fulfilled by the wrong woman!'

To that result, her enquiries had inscrutably conducted her! If she had only pressed them a little farther—if she had not unconsciously led me astray again by the very next question that fell from her lips—she *must* have communicated to *my* mind, the idea obscurely germinating in hers—the idea of a possible identity between the Mary of my first love and Mrs. Van Brandt!

'Tell me,' she went on. 'If you met with your little Mary now, what would she be like? what sort of woman would you expect to see?'

I could hardly help laughing. 'How can I tell,' I rejoined, 'at this distance of time?'

'Try!' she said.

Reasoning my way from the known personality to the unknown, I searched my memory for the image of the frail and delicate child of my remembrance; and I drew the picture of a frail and delicate woman—the most absolute contrast imaginable to Mrs. Van Brandt!

The half-realised idea of identity in the mind of Miss Dunross dropped out of it instantly, expelled by the substantial conclusion which the contrast implied. Alike ignorant of the after-growth of health, strength, and beauty which time and circumstances had developed in the Mary of my youthful days, we had alike completely and unconsciously misled one another. Once

more, I had missed the discovery of the truth, and missed it by a hairsbreadth!

'I infinitely prefer your portrait of Mary, said Miss Dunross, 'to your portrait of Mrs. Van Brandt. Mary realises my idea of what a really-attractive woman ought to be. How you can have felt any sorrow for the loss of that other person (I detest buxom women!) passes my understanding. I can't tell you how interested I am in Mary! I want to know more about her. Where is that pretty present of needlework which the poor little thing embroidered for you so industriously? Do let me see the green flag!'

She evidently supposed that I carried the green flag about me! I felt a little confused as I answered her.

'I am sorry to disappoint you. The green flag is somewhere in my house in Perthshire.'

'You have not got it with you?' she

exclaimed. 'You leave her keepsake lying about anywhere? Oh, Mr. Germaine, you have indeed forgotten Mary! A woman, in your place, would have parted with her life rather than part with the one memorial left of the time when she first loved!'

She spoke with such extraordinary earnestness—with such agitation, I might almost say—that she quite startled me.

'Dear Miss Dunross,' I remonstrated, 'the flag is not lost.'

'I should hope not!' she interposed quickly. 'If you lose the green flag, you lose the last relic of Mary—and more than that, if *my* belief is right.'

'What do you believe?'

'You will laugh at me if I tell you. I am afraid my first reading of your face was wrong—I am afraid you are a hard man.'

'Indeed you do me an injustice. I entreat you to answer me as frankly as

usual. What do I lose in losing the last relic of Mary?'

'You lose the one hope I have for you,' she answered gravely—'the hope of your meeting and your marriage with Mary in the time to come. I was sleepless last night, and I was thinking of your pretty love story by the banks of the bright English lake. The longer I thought, the more firmly I felt the conviction that the poor child's green flag is destined to have its innocent influence in forming your future life. Your happiness is waiting for you in that artless little keepsake! I can't explain or justify this belief of mine. It is one of my eccentricities, I suppose—like training my cats to perform to the music of my harp. But, if I was your old friend, instead of being only your friend of a few days, I would leave you no peace—I would beg and entreat and persist, as only a woman *can* persist—until I had made

Mary's gift as close a companion of yours, as your mother's portrait in the locket there at your watch chain. While the flag is with you, Mary's influence is with you—Mary's love is still binding you by the dear old tie—and Mary and you, after years of separation, will meet again!'

The fancy was in itself pretty and poetical; the earnestness which had given expression to it would have had its influence over a man of a far harder nature than mine. I confess she had made me ashamed, if she had done nothing more, of my neglect of the green flag.

'I will look for it, the moment I am at home again,' I said; 'and I will take care that it is carefully preserved for the future.'

'I want more than that,' she rejoined. 'If you can't wear the flag about you, I want it always to be *with* you—to go wherever you go. When they brought your luggage

here from the vessel at Lerwick, you were particularly anxious about the safety of your travelling writing-desk—the desk there on the table. Is there anything very valuable in it?'

'It contains my money, and other things that I prize far more highly—my mother's letters, and some family relics which I should be very sorry to lose. Besides, the desk itself has its own familiar interest as my constant travelling companion of many years past.'

Miss Dunross rose, and came close to the chair in which I was sitting.

'Let Mary's flag be your constant travelling companion,' she said. 'You have spoken far too gratefully of my services here as your nurse. Reward me beyond my deserts. Make allowances, Mr. Germaine, for the superstitious fancies of a lonely dreamy woman. Promise me that the green flag

shall take its place among the other little treasures in your desk!'

It is needless to say that I made the allowances and gave the promise—gave it, resolving seriously to abide by it. For the first time since I had known her, she put her poor wasted hand in mine, and pressed it for a moment. Acting heedlessly under my first grateful impulse, I lifted her hand to my lips, before I released it. She started—trembled—and suddenly and silently passed out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

SHE COMES BETWEEN US.

WHAT emotion had I thoughtlessly aroused in Miss Dunross? Had I offended or distressed her? Or had I, without meaning it, forced on her inner knowledge some deeply seated feeling which she had thus far resolutely ignored?

I looked back through the days of my sojourn in the house; I questioned my own feelings and impressions, on the chance that they might serve me as a means of solving the mystery of her sudden flight from the room.

What effect had she produced on me?

In plain truth, she had simply taken her

place in my mind, to the exclusion of every other person and every other subject. In ten days she had taken a hold on my sympathies of which other women would have failed to possess themselves in as many years. I remembered, to my shame, that my mother had but seldom occupied my thoughts. Even the image of Mrs. Van Brandt—except when the conversation had turned on her—had become a faint image in my mind! As to my friends at Lerwick, from Sir James downwards, they had all kindly come to see me—and I had secretly and ungratefully rejoiced when their departure left the scene free for the return of my nurse. In two days more the Government vessel was to sail on the return voyage. My wrist was still painful when I tried to use it; but the far more serious injury presented by the reopened wound was no longer a subject of anxiety to myself or to anyone about me.

I was sufficiently restored to be capable of making the journey to Lerwick—if I rested for one night at a farm half way between the town and Mr. Dunross's house. Knowing this, I had nevertheless left the question of rejoining the vessel undecided to the very latest moment. The motive which I pleaded to my friends was—uncertainty as to the sufficient recovery of my strength. The motive which I now confessed to myself was —reluctance to leave Miss Dunross.

What was the secret of her power over me? What emotion, what passion, had she awakened in me? Was it love?

No: not love. The place which Mary had once held in my heart, the place which Mrs. Van Brandt had taken in the after-time, was not the place occupied by Miss Dunross. How could I (in the ordinary sense of the word) be in love with a woman whose face I had never seen? whose beauty had faded,

never to bloom again? whose wasted life hung by a thread which the accident of a moment might snap. The senses have their share in all love between the sexes which is worthy of the name. They had no share in the feeling with which I regarded Miss Dunross. What *was* the feeling then? I can only answer the question in one way. The feeling lay too deep in me for my sounding.

What impression had I produced on her? What sensitive chord had I ignorantly touched, when my lips touched her hand?

I confess I recoiled from pursuing the enquiry which I had deliberately set myself to make. I thought of her shattered health; of her melancholy existence in shadow and solitude; of the rich treasures of such a heart and such a mind as hers, wasted with her wasting life—and I said to myself, Let

her secret be sacred! let me never again, by word or deed, bring the trouble which tells of it to the surface! let her heart be veiled from me in the darkness which veils her face!

In this frame of mind towards her, I waited her return.

I had no doubt of seeing her again, sooner or later, on that day. The post to the south went out on the next day; and the early hour of the morning at which the messenger called for our letters, made it a matter of ordinary convenience to write overnight. In the disabled state of my hand Miss Dunross had been accustomed to write home for me, under my dictation: she knew that I owed a letter to my mother, and that I relied as usual on her help. Her return to me, under these circumstances, was simply a question of time: any duty which she had once undertaken was an imperative duty in

her estimation, no matter how trifling it might be.

The hours wore on; the day drew to its end—and still she never appeared.

I left my room to enjoy the last sunny gleam of the daylight in the garden attached to the house; first telling Peter where I might be found, if Miss Dunross wanted me. The garden was a wild place, to my southern notions; but it extended for some distance along the shore of the island; and it offered some pleasant views of the lake and the moorland country beyond. Slowly pursuing my walk, I proposed to myself to occupy my mind to some useful purpose, by arranging beforehand the composition of the letter which Miss Dunross was to write.

To my great surprise, I found it simply impossible to fix my attention on the subject. Try as I might, my thoughts persisted in wandering from the letter to my mother,

and concentrated themselves instead—on Miss Dunross? No. On the question of my returning, or not returning to Perthshire by the Government vessel? No. By some capricious revulsion of feeling which it seemed impossible to account for, my whole mind (now that I was out of the atmosphere of the darkened room) was absorbed by the one subject which had been hitherto so strangely absent from it—the subject of Mrs. Van Brandt!

My memory went back, in defiance of all exercise of my own will, to my last interview with her. I saw her again; I heard her again. I tasted once more the momentary rapture of our last kiss; I felt once more the pang of sorrow that wrung me when I had parted with her and found myself alone in the street. Tears—of which I was ashamed, though nobody was near to see them—filled my eyes when I thought of the

months that had passed since we had last looked on one another, and of all that she might have suffered, must have suffered, in that time. Hundreds on hundreds of miles were between us—and yet she was now as near me as if she had been walking in the garden by my side!

This strange condition of my mind was matched by an equally strange condition of my body. A mysterious trembling shuddered over me faintly from head to foot. I walked without feeling the ground as I trod on it; I looked about me with no distinct consciousness of what the objects were on which my eyes rested. My hands were cold —and yet I hardly felt it. My head throbbed hotly—and yet I was not sensible of any pain. It seemed as if I was surrounded and enwrapped in some electric atmosphere which altered all the ordinary conditions of sensation. I looked up at the

clear calm sky, and wondered if a thunder-storm was coming. I stopped, and buttoned my coat round me, and questioned myself if I had caught a cold, or if I was going to have a fever. The sun sank below the moorland horizon; the grey twilight trembled over the dark waters of the lake. I went back to the house; and the vivid memory of Mrs. Van Brandt, still in close companionship, went back with me.

The fire in my room had burnt low in my absence. One of the closed curtains had been drawn back a few inches, so as to admit through the window a ray of the dying light. Beyond the limit where the light was bounded by the obscurity which filled the rest of the room, I saw Miss Dunross seated, with her veil drawn and her writing-case on her knee, waiting my return.

I hastened to make my excuses. I

assured her that I had been careful to tell the servant where to find me. She gently checked me, before I could say more.

'It's not Peter's fault,' she said. 'I told him not to hurry your return to the house. Have you enjoyed your walk?'

She spoke very quietly. The faint sad voice was fainter and sadder than ever. She kept her head bent over her writing-case, instead of turning it towards me as usual while we were talking. I still felt the mysterious trembling which had oppressed me in the garden. Drawing a chair near the fire, I stirred the embers together, and tried to warm myself. Our positions in the room left some little distance between us. I could only see her sideways, as she sat by the window in the sheltering darkness of the curtain which still remained drawn.

'I think I have been too long in the

garden,' I said. 'I feel chilled by the cold evening air.'

'Will you have some more wood put on the fire?' she asked. 'Can I get you anything?'

'No, thank you. I shall do very well here. I see you are kindly ready to write for me.'

'Yes,' she said, 'at your own convenience. When you are ready, my pen is ready.'

The unacknowledged reserve that had come between us since we had last spoken together was, I believe, as painfully felt by her as by me. We were no doubt longing to break through it on either side—if we had only known how. The writing of the letter would occupy us at any rate. I made another effort to give my mind to the subject —and once more it was an effort made in

vain. Knowing what I wanted to say to my mother, my faculties seemed to be paralysed when I tried to say it. I sat cowering by the fire—and she sat waiting with her writing-case on her lap.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE CLAIMS ME AGAIN.

THE moments passed; the silence between us continued. Miss Dunross made an attempt to rouse me.

'Have you decided to go back to Scotland with your friends at Lerwick?' she asked.

'It is no easy matter,' I replied, 'to decide on leaving my friends in this house.'

Her head drooped lower on her bosom; her voice sank as she answered me.

'Think of your mother,' she said. 'The first duty you owe is your duty to her. Your long absence is a heavy trial to her—your mother is suffering.'

Suffering?' I repeated. 'Her letters say nothing——'

'You forget that you have allowed me to read her letters,' Miss Dunross interposed. 'I see the unwritten and unconscious confession of anxiety in every line that she writes to you. You know, as well as I do, that there is cause for her anxiety. Make her happy by telling her that you sail for home with your friends. Make her happier still by telling her that you grieve no more over the loss of Mrs. Van Brandt. May I write it, in your name and in those words?'

I felt the strangest reluctance to permit her to write in those terms, or in any terms, of Mrs. Van Brandt. The unhappy love-story of my manhood had never been a forbidden subject between us on former occasions. Why did I feel as if it had become a forbidden subject now? Why did I evade giving her a direct reply?

'We have plenty of time before us,' I said. 'I want to speak to you about yourself.'

She lifted her hand in the obscurity that surrounded her, as if to protest against the topic to which I had returned. I persisted nevertheless in returning to it.

'If I must go back,' I went on, 'I may venture to say to you at parting, what I have not said yet. I cannot, and will not, believe that you are an incurable invalid. My education, as I have told you, has been the education of a medical man. I am well acquainted with some of the greatest living physicians, in Edinburgh, as well as in London. Will you allow me to describe your malady (as I understand it) to men who are accustomed to treat cases of intricate nervous disorder? And will you let me write and tell you the result?'

I waited for her reply. Neither by word

nor sign did she encourage the idea of any future communication with her. I ventured to suggest another motive which might induce her to receive a letter from me.

'In any case, I may find it necessary to write to you,' I went on. 'You firmly believe that I and my little Mary are destined to meet again. If your anticipations are realised, you will expect me to tell you of it, surely?'

Once more, I waited. She spoke—but it was not to reply: it was only to change the subject.

'The time is passing,' was all she said. 'We have not begun your letter to your mother, yet.'

It would have been cruel to contend with her any longer. Her voice warned me that she was suffering. The faint gleam of light through the parted curtains was fading fast. It was time indeed to write the letter. I

could find other opportunities of speaking to her, before I left the house.

'I am ready,' I answered. 'Let us begin.'

The first sentence was easily dictated to my patient secretary. I informed my mother that my sprained wrist was nearly restored to use, and that nothing prevented my leaving Shetland, when the lighthouse commissioner was ready to return. This was all that it was necessary to say on the subject of my health; the disaster of my reopened wound having been, for obvious reasons, concealed from my mother's knowledge. Miss Dunross silently wrote the opening lines of the letter, and waited for the words that were to follow.

In my next sentence, I announced the date at which the vessel was to sail on the return voyage; and I mentioned the period at which my mother might expect to see me,

weather permitting. Those words also Miss Dunross wrote—and waited again. I set myself to consider what I should say next. To my surprise and alarm, I found it impossible to fix my mind on the subject. My thoughts wandered away from my letter, in the strangest manner, to Mrs. Van Brandt. I was ashamed of myself; I was angry with myself—I resolved, no matter what I said, that I would positively finish the letter. No! try as I might, the utmost effort of my will availed me nothing. Mrs. Van Brandt's words at our last interview were murmuring in my ears—not a word of my own would come to me!

Miss Dunross laid down her pen, and slowly turned her head to look at me.

'Surely you have something more to add to your letter?' she said.

'Certainly,' I answered. 'I don't know what is the matter with me. The effort of

dictating seems to be beyond my power this evening.'

'Can I help you?' she asked.

I gladly accepted the suggestion. 'There are many things,' I said, 'which my mother would be glad to hear, if I was not too stupid to think of them. I am sure I may trust your sympathy to think of them for me.'

That rash answer offered Miss Dunross the opportunity of returning to the subject of Mrs. Van Brandt. She seized the opportunity with a woman's persistent resolution when she has her end in view, and is determined to reach it at all hazards.

'You have not told your mother yet,' she said, 'that your infatuation for Mrs. Van Brandt is at an end. Will you put it in your own words? Or shall I write it for you, imitating your language as well as I can?'

In the state of my mind at that moment, her perseverance conquered me. I thought to myself indolently, 'If I say No, she will

only return to the subject again, and she will end (after all I owe to her kindness) in making me say Yes.' Before I could answer her, she had realised my anticipations. She returned to the subject; and she made me say Yes.

'What does your silence mean?' she said. 'Do you ask me to help you—and do you refuse to accept the first suggestion I offer?'

'Take up your pen,' I rejoined. 'It shall be as you wish.'

'Will you dictate the words?'

'I will try.'

I tried; and, this time, I succeeded. With the image of Mrs. Van Brandt vividly present to my mind, I arranged the first words of the sentence which was to tell my mother that my 'infatuation' was at an end!

'You will be glad to hear,' I began, 'that time and change are doing their good work.'

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Miss Dunross wrote the words, and paused in anticipation of the next sentence. The light faded and faded; the room grew darker and darker. I went on:

'I hope I shall cause you no more anxiety, my dear mother, on the subject of Mrs. Van Brandt.'

In the deep silence, I could hear the pen of my secretary, travelling steadily over the paper, while it wrote those words.

'Have you written?' I asked, as the sound of the pen ceased.

'I have written,' she answered, in her customary quiet tones.

I went on again with my letter.

'The days pass now, and I seldom or never think of her; I hope I am resigned at last to the loss of Mrs. Van Brandt.'

As I reached the end of the sentence, I heard a faint cry from Miss Dunross. Looking instantly towards her, I could just see,

in the deepening darkness, that her head had fallen on the back of the chair. My first impulse was, of course, to rise and go to her. I had barely got to my feet, when some indescribable dread paralysed me on the instant. Supporting myself against the chimney-piece, I stood perfectly incapable of advancing a step. The effort to speak was the one effort that I could make.

'Are you ill?' I asked.

She was able to answer me; speaking in a whisper, without raising her head.

'I am frightened,' she said.

'What has frightened you?'

I heard her shudder in the darkness. Instead of answering me, she whispered to herself, 'What am I to say to him?'

'Tell me what has frightened you,' I repeated. 'You know you may trust me with the truth.'

She rallied her sinking strength She answered in these strange words:

'Something has come between me and the letter that I am writing for you.'

'What is it?'

'I can't tell you.'

'Can you see it?'

'No.'

'Can you feel it?'

'Yes!'

'What is it like?'

'Like a breath of cold air between me and the letter.'

'Has the window come open?'

'The window is close shut.'

'And the door?'

'The door is shut also—as well as I can see. Make sure of it for yourself. Where are you? What are you doing?'

I was looking towards the window. As

she spoke her last words, I was conscious of a change in that part of the room.

In the gap between the parted curtains there was a new light shining—not the dim grey twilight of Nature, but a pure and starry radiance, a pale unearthly light. While I watched it, the starry radiance quivered as if some breath of air had stirred it. When it was still again, there dawned on me through the unearthly lustre the figure of a woman. By fine and slow gradations, it became more and more distinct. I knew the noble figure; I knew the sad and tender smile. For the second time, I stood in the presence of the apparition of Mrs. Van Brandt.

She was robed, not as I had last seen her, but in the dress which she had worn on the memorable evening when we met on the bridge—in the dress in which she had first

appeared to me, by the waterfall in Scotland. The starry light shone round her like a halo. She looked at me with sorrowful and pleading eyes, as she had looked when I saw the apparition of her in the summer-house. She lifted her hand—not beckoning me to approach her as before, but gently signing to me to remain where I stood.

I waited—feeling awe, but no fear. My heart was all hers as I looked at her.

She moved ; gliding from the window to the chair in which Miss Dunross sat ; winding her way slowly round it, until she stood at the back. By the light of the pale halo that encircled the ghostly Presence, and moved with it, I could see the dark figure of the living woman, seated immovable in the chair. The writing-case was on her lap, with the letter and the pen lying on it. Her arms hung helpless at her sides ; her veiled head was now bent forward. She looked as if she

had been petrified in the act of trying to rise from her seat.

A moment passed—and I saw the ghostly Presence stoop over the living woman. It lifted the writing-case from her lap. It rested the writing-case on her shoulder. Its white fingers took the pen, and wrote on the unfinished letter. It put the writing-case back on the lap of the living woman. Still standing behind the chair, it turned towards me. It looked at me once more. And now it beckoned—beckoned to me to approach.

Moving without conscious will of my own, as I had moved when I first saw her in the summer-house—drawn nearer and nearer by an irresistible power—I approached, and stopped within a few paces of her. She advanced, and laid her hand on my bosom. Again I felt those strangely-mingled sensations of rapture and awe, which had once before filled me when I was conscious,

spiritually, of her touch. Again she spoke, in the low melodious tones which I recalled so well. Again she said the words: 'Remember me. Come to me.' Her hand dropped from my bosom. The pale light in which she stood quivered, sank, vanished. I saw the twilight glimmering between the curtains —and I saw no more. She had spoken. She had gone.

I was near Miss Dunross—near enough, when I put out my hand, to touch her.

She started and shuddered, like a woman suddenly awakened from a dreadful dream.

'Speak to me!' she whispered. 'Let me know that it is *you* who touched me.'

I spoke a few composing words before I questioned her.

'Have you seen anything in the room?'

She answered. 'I have been filled with a deadly fear. I have seen nothing but the writing-case lifted from my lap.'

'Did you see the hand that lifted it?'

'No.'

'Did you see a starry light, and a figure standing in the light?'

'No.'

'Did you see the writing-case after it was lifted from your lap?'

'I saw it resting on my shoulder.'

Did you see writing on the letter, which was not *your* writing?'

'I saw a darker shadow on the paper than the shadow in which I am sitting.'

'Did it move?'

'It moved across the paper.'

'In what direction did it move?'

'From right to left.'

'As a pen moves in writing?'

'Yes. As a pen moves in writing.'

'May I take the letter?'

She handed it to me.

'May I light a candle?'

She drew her veil more closely over her face, and bowed in silence.

I lit the candle on the mantel-piece behind her, and looked for the writing.

There, on the blank space in the letter—as I had seen it before on the blank space in the sketch-book—there were the written words which the ghostly Presence had left behind it; arranged once more in two lines, as I copy them here—

AT THE MONTH'S END
IN THE SHADOW OF ST. PAUL'S.

CHAPTER V.

THE KISS.

SHE had need of me again. She had claimed me again. I felt all the old love, all the old devotion, owning her power once more. Whatever had mortified or angered me at our last interview, was forgiven and forgotten now. My whole being still thrilled with the mingled awe and rapture of beholding the Vision of her that had come to me for the second time. The minutes passed—and I stood by the fire like a man entranced; thinking only of her spoken words, 'Remember me. Come to me;' looking only at her mystic writing, 'At the month's end. In the shadow of St. Paul's.'

The month's end was still far off; the apparition of her had shown itself to me, under some subtle prevision of trouble that was still in the future. Ample time was before me for the pilgrimage to which I was self-dedicated already—my pilgrimage to the shadow of St. Paul's.

Other men, in my position, might have hesitated as to the right understanding of the place to which they were bidden. Other men might have wearied their memories by recalling the churches, the institutions, the streets, the towns in foreign countries, all consecrated to Christian reverence by the great Apostle's name, and might have fruitlessly asked themselves in which direction they were first to turn their steps. No such difficulty troubled me. My first conclusion was the one conclusion that was acceptable to my mind. 'St. Paul's' meant the famous Cathedral of London. Where the shadow

of the great church fell, there, at the month's end, I should find her, or the trace of her. In London once more, and nowhere else, I was destined to see the woman I loved, in the living body, as certainly as I had just seen her in the ghostly presence.

Who could interpret the mysterious sympathies that still united us, in defiance of distance, in defiance of time? Who could predict to what end our lives were tending in the years that were to come?

Those questions were still present to my thoughts; my eyes were still fixed on the mysterious writing—when I became instinctively aware of the strange silence in the room. Instantly, the lost remembrance of Miss Dunross came back to me. Stung by my own sense of self-reproach, I turned with a start, and looked towards her chair by the window.

The chair was empty. I was alone in the room.

Why had she left me secretly, without a word of farewell? Because she was suffering, in mind or body? Or because she resented, naturally resented, my neglect of her?

The bare suspicion that I had given her pain was intolerable to me. I rang the bell, to make enquiries.

The bell was answered, not as usual by the silent servant Peter, but by a woman of middle age, very quietly and neatly dressed, whom I had once or twice met on the way to and from my room, and of whose exact position in the house I was still ignorant.

'Do you wish to see Peter?' she asked.

'No. I wish to know where Miss Dunross is.'

'Miss Dunross is in her room. She has sent me to you with this letter.'

I took the letter, feeling some surprise and uneasiness. It was the first time Miss Dunross had communicated with me in that formal way. I tried to gain further information by questioning her messenger.

'Are you Miss Dunross's maid?' I asked.

'I have served Miss Dunross for many years,' was the answer, spoken very ungraciously.

'Do you think she would receive me, if I sent you with a message to her?'

'I can't say, sir. The letter may tell you. You will do well to read the letter.'

We looked at each other. The woman's pre-conceived impression of me was evidently an unfavourable one. Had I indeed pained or offended Miss Dunross? And had the servant—perhaps the faithful servant who loved her—discovered and resented it? The woman frowned as she looked at me.

It would be a mere waste of words to persist in questioning her. I let her go.

Left by myself again, I read the letter. It began, without any form of address, in these lines :

'I write, instead of speaking to you, because my self-control has already been severely tried, and I am not strong enough to bear more. For my father's sake—not for my own—I must take all the care I can of the little health that I have left.

'Putting together what you have told me of the visionary creature whom you saw in the summer-house in Scotland, and what you said when you questioned me in your room a little while since, I cannot fail to infer that the same Vision has shown itself to you, for the second time. The fear that I felt, the strange things that I saw (or thought I saw), may have been imperfect reflections in my mind of what was passing in yours. I do

not stop to enquire whether we are both the victims of a delusion, or whether we are the chosen recipients of a supernatural communication. The result, in either case, is enough for me. You are once more under the influence of Mrs. Van Brandt. I will not trust myself to tell you of the anxieties and forebodings by which I am oppressed: I will only acknowledge that my one hope for you is in your speedy re-union with the worthier object of your constancy and devotion. I still believe, and am consoled in believing, that you and your first love will meet again.

'Having written so far, I leave the subject—not to return to it, except in my own thoughts.

'The necessary preparations for your departure to-morrow are all made. Nothing remains but to wish you a safe and pleasant journey home. Do not, I entreat you, think

me insensible of what I owe to you, if I say my farewell words here.

'The little services which you have allowed me to render you have brightened the closing days of my life. You have left me a treasury of happy memories which I shall hoard, when you are gone, with miserly care. Are you willing to add new claims to my grateful remembrance? I ask it of you, as a last favour—do not attempt to see me again! Do not expect me to take a personal leave of you! The saddest of all words is "Goodbye:" I have fortitude enough to write it, and no more. God preserve and prosper you—farewell!

'One more request. I beg that you will not forget what you promised me, when I told you my foolish fancy about the green flag. Wherever you go, let Mary's keepsake go with you. No written answer is necessary—I would rather not receive it. Look

up, when you leave the house to-morrow, at the centre window over the doorway—that will be answer enough.'

To say that these melancholy lines brought the tears into my eyes, is only to acknowledge that I had sympathies which could be touched. When I had in some degree recovered my composure, the impulse which urged me to write to Miss Dunross was too strong to be resisted. I did not trouble her with a long letter—I only entreated her to reconsider her decision, with all the art of persuasion which I could summon to help me. The answer was brought back by the servant who waited on Miss Dunross, in three resolute words :—'It cannot be.' This time the woman spoke out before she left me. 'If you have any regard for my mistress,' she said sternly, 'don't make her write to you again.' She looked at me with a last lowering frown, and left the room.

It is needless to say that the faithful servant's words only increased my anxiety to see Miss Dunross once more before we parted —perhaps for ever. My one last hope of success in attaining this object lay in approaching her indirectly through the intercession of her father.

I sent Peter to enquire if I might be permitted to pay my respects to his master that evening. My messenger returned with an answer which was a new disappointment to me. Mr. Dunross begged that I would excuse him if he deferred the proposed interview until the next morning. The next morning was the morning of my departure. Did the message mean that he had no wish to see me again until the time had come to take leave of him? I enquired of Peter whether his master was particularly occupied that evening. He was unable to tell me. 'The Master of Books' was not in his study

as usual. When he sent his message to me, he was sitting by the sofa in his daughter's room.

Having answered in those terms, the man left me by myself until the next morning. I do not wish my bitterest enemy a sadder time in his life than the time I passed, on the last night of my residence under Mr. Dunross's roof.

After walking to and fro in the room until I was weary, I thought of trying to divert my mind from the sad thoughts that oppressed it, by reading. The one candle which I had lit failed to sufficiently illuminate the room. Advancing to the mantelpiece to light the second candle which stood there, I noticed the unfinished letter to my mother lying where I had placed it, when Miss Dunross's servant first presented herself before me. Having lit the second candle, I took up the letter to put it away among my

other papers. Doing this (while my thoughts were still dwelling on Miss Dunross), I mechanically looked at the letter again—and instantly discovered a change in it.

The written characters traced by the hand of the apparition had vanished! Below the last lines written by Miss Dunross, nothing met my eye now but the blank white paper!

My first impulse was to look at my watch.

When the ghostly Presence had written in my sketch-book, the characters had disappeared after an interval of three hours. On this occasion, as nearly as I could calculate, the writing had vanished in one hour only.

Reverting to the conversation which I had held with Mrs. Van Brandt when we met at Saint Anthony's Well, and to the discoveries which followed at a later period

of my life, I can only repeat that she had again been the subject of a trance or dream, when the apparition of her showed itself to me for the second time. As before, she had freely trusted me and freely appealed to me to help her, in the dreaming state, when her spirit was free to recognise my spirit. When she had come to herself, after an interval of an hour, she had again felt ashamed of the familiar manner in which she had communicated with me in the trance; had again unconsciously counteracted by her waking-will the influence of her sleeping-will; and had thus caused the writing once more to disappear, in an hour from the moment when the pen had traced (or seemed to trace) it.

This is still the one explanation that I can offer. At the time when the incident happened, I was far from being fully admitted to the confidence of Mrs. Van Brandt; and I was necessarily incapable of arriving at

any solution of the mystery right or wrong. I could only put away the letter, doubting vaguely whether my own senses had not deceived me. After the distressing thoughts which Miss Dunross's letter had roused in my mind, I was in no humour to employ my ingenuity in finding a clue to the mystery of the vanished writing. My nerves were irritated; I felt a sense of angry discontent with myself and with others. 'Go where I may' (I thought impatiently), 'the disturbing influence of women seems to be the only influence that I am fated to feel.' As I still paced backwards and forwards in my room, —it was useless to think now of fixing my attention on a book—I fancied I understood the motives which made men as young as I was retire to end their lives in a monastery. I drew aside the window curtains, and looked out. The only prospect that met my view was the black

gulf of darkness in which the lake lay hidden. I could see nothing; I could do nothing; I could think of nothing. The one alternative before me was the alternative of trying to sleep. My medical knowledge told me plainly that natural sleep was, in my nervous condition, one of the unattainable luxuries of life, for that night. The medicine-chest which Mr. Dunross had placed at my disposal remained in the room. I mixed for myself a strong sleeping draught, and sullenly took refuge from my troubles in bed.

It is a peculiarity of most of the soporific drugs that they not only act in a totally different manner on different constitutions, but that they are not even to be depended on to act always in the same manner on the same person. I had taken care to extinguish the candles before I got into my bed. Under ordinary circumstances, after I had laid

quietly in the darkness for half-an-hour, the draught that I had taken would have sent me to sleep. In the present state of my nerves the draught stupefied me, and did no more.

Hour after hour, I lay perfectly still, with my eyes closed, in the semi-sleeping, semi-wakeful state which is so curiously characteristic of the ordinary repose of a dog. As the night wore on, such a sense of heaviness oppressed my eyelids that it was literally impossible for me to open them—such a masterful languor possessed all my muscles that I could no more move on my pillow than if I had been a corpse. And yet, in this somnolent condition, my mind was able to pursue lazy trains of pleasant thought. My sense of hearing was so acute that it caught the faintest sounds made by the passage of the night breeze through the rushes of the lake. Inside my bedchamber, I was even more keenly sensible of those weird night-noises

in the heavy furniture of a room, of those sudden settlements of extinct coals in the grate, so familiar to bad sleepers, so startling to overwrought nerves! It is not a scientifically correct statement, but it exactly describes my condition, that night, to say that one-half of me was asleep and the other half awake.

How many hours of the night had passed, when my irritable sense of hearing became aware of a new sound in the room, I cannot tell. I can only relate that I found myself on a sudden listening intently, with fast-closed eyes. The sound that disturbed me was the faintest sound imaginable, as of something soft and light travelling slowly over the surface of the carpet, and brushing it just loud enough to be heard.

Little by little, the sound came nearer and nearer to my bed—and then suddenly stopped just as I fancied it was close by me.

I still lay immovable, with closed eyes; drowsily waiting for the next sound that might reach my ears; drowsily content with the silence, if the silence continued. My thoughts (if thoughts they could be called) were drifting back again into their former course, when I became suddenly conscious of soft breathing just above me. The next moment, I felt a touch on my forehead—light, soft, tremulous, like the touch of lips that had kissed me. There was a momentary pause. Then, a low sigh trembled through the silence. Then, I heard again the still small sound of something brushing its way over the carpet; travelling this time *from* my bed, and moving so rapidly that in a moment more it was lost in the silence of the night.

Still stupefied by the drug that I had taken, I could lazily wonder what had happened, and I could do no more. Had living

lips really touched me? Was the sound that I had heard really the sound of a sigh? Or was it all delusion, beginning and ending in a dream? The time passed without my deciding, or caring to decide, those questions. Minute by minute, the composing influence of the draught began at last to strengthen its hold on my brain. A cloud seemed to pass softly over my last waking impressions. One after another, the ties broke gently that held me to conscious life. I drifted peacefully into perfect sleep.

Shortly after sunrise I awoke. When I regained the use of my memory, my first clear recollection was the recollection of the soft breathing which I had felt above me—then of the touch on my forehead, and of the sigh which I had heard after it. Was it possible that someone had entered my room in the night? It was quite possible. I had

not locked the door—I had never been in the habit of locking the door during my residence under Mr. Dunross's roof.

After thinking it over a little, I rose to examine my room.

Nothing in the shape of a discovery rewarded me, until I reached the door. Though I had not locked it overnight, I had certainly satisfied myself that it was closed before I went to bed. It was now ajar. Had it opened again, through being imperfectly shut? or had a person, after entering and leaving my room, forgotten to close it?

Accidentally looking downwards while I was weighing these probabilities, I noticed a small black object on the carpet, lying just under the key, on the inner side of the door. I picked the thing up, and found that it was a torn morsel of black lace.

The instant I saw the fragment, I was reminded of the long black veil, hanging

below her waist, which it was the habit of Miss Dunross to wear. Was it *her* dress then that I had heard softly travelling over the carpet; *her* kiss that had touched my forehead; *her* sigh that had trembled through the silence? Had the ill-fated and noble creature taken her last leave of me in the dead of night; trusting the preservation of her secret to the deceitful appearances which persuaded her that I was asleep? I looked again at the fragment of black lace. Her long veil might easily have been caught, and torn, by the projecting key, as she passed rapidly through the door on her way out of my room. Sadly and reverently I laid the morsel of lace among the treasured memorials which I had brought with me from home. To the end of her life, I vowed it, she should be left undisturbed in the belief that her secret was safe in her own breast! Ardently as I still longed to take her hand at parting,

I now resolved to make no further effort to see her. I might not be master of my own emotions; something in my face or in my manner might betray me to her quick and delicate perception. Knowing what I now knew, the last sacrifice I could make to her, would be to obey her wishes. I made the sacrifice.

In an hour more Peter informed me that the ponies were at the door, and that the Master was waiting for me in the outer hall.

I noticed that Mr. Dunross gave me his hand, without looking at me. His faded blue eyes, during the few minutes while we were together, were not once raised from the ground.

'God speed you on your journey, sir, and guide you safely home,' he said. 'I beg you to forgive me if I fail to accompany you on the first few miles of your journey. There

are reasons which oblige me to remain with my daughter in the house.'

He was scrupulously, almost painfully, courteous—but there was something in his manner which, for the first time in my experience, seemed designedly to keep me at a distance from him. Knowing the intimate sympathy, the perfect confidence, which existed between the father and daughter, a doubt crossed my mind, whether the secret of the past night was entirely a secret to Mr. Dunross. His next words set that doubt at rest, and showed me the truth.

In thanking him for his good wishes, I attempted also to express to him (and through him to Miss Dunross) my sincere sense of gratitude for the kindness which I had received under his roof. He stopped me, politely and resolutely; speaking with that quaintly precise choice of language which I

had remarked as characteristic of him at our first interview.

'It is in your power, sir,' he said, 'to return any obligation which you may think you have incurred on leaving my house. If you will be pleased to consider your residence here as an unimportant episode in your life, which ends—*absolutely* ends—with your departure, you will more than repay any kindness that you may have received as my guest. In saying this, I speak under a sense of duty which does entire justice to *you*, as a gentleman and a man of honour. I am sure I may trust to your discretion, not to misjudge my motives, if I abstain from explaining myself any farther.'

A faint colour flushed his pale cheeks. He waited, with a certain proud resignation, for my reply. I respected her secret, respected it more resolutely than ever, before her father.

'After all that I owe to you, sir,' I answered, 'your wishes are my commands.' Saying that, and saying no more, I bowed to him with marked respect, and left the house.

Mounting my pony at the door, I looked up at the centre window, as she had bidden me. It was open; but dark curtains, jealously closed, kept out the light from the room within. At the sound of the pony's hoofs on the rough island road, as the animal moved, the curtains were parted for a few inches only. Through the gap in the dark draperies, a wan white hand appeared; waved tremulously a last farewell; and vanished from my view. The curtains closed again on her dark and solitary life. The dreary wind sounded its long low dirge over the rippling waters of the lake. The ponies took their places in the ferry-boat which was kept for the passage of animals to and from the island. With slow regular

strokes the men rowed us to the mainland, and took their leave. I looked back at the distant house. I thought of her in the dark room, waiting patiently for death. Burning tears blinded me. The guide took my bridle in his hand.

'You're not well, sir,' he said; 'I will lead the pony.'

When I looked again at the landscape round me, we had descended in the interval from the higher ground to the lower. The house and the lake had disappeared, to be seen no more.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE SHADOW OF SAINT PAUL'S.

In ten days I was at home again—and my mother's arms were round me.

I had left her for my sea voyage very unwillingly—seeing that she was in delicate health. On my return, I was grieved to observe a change for the worse, for which her letters had not prepared me. Consulting our medical friend Mr. MacGlue, I found that he too had noticed my mother's failing health, but that he attributed it to an easily removable cause—to the climate of Scotland. My mother's childhood and early life had been passed on the southern shores of

England. The change to the raw keen air of the north had been a trying change to a person at her age. In Mr. MacGlue's opinion, the wise course to take would be to return to the south before the autumn was farther advanced, and to make our arrangements for passing the coming winter at Penzance or Torquay.

Resolved as I was to keep the mysterious appointment which summoned me to London at the month's end, Mr. MacGlue's suggestion met with no opposition on my part. It had, to my mind, the great merit of obviating the necessity of a second separation from my mother—assuming that she approved of the doctor's advice. I put the question to her the same day. To my infinite relief she was not only ready, but eager, to take the journey to the south. The season had been unusually wet, even for Scotland; and my mother reluctantly confessed that she 'did feel a

certain longing' for the mild air and genial sunshine of the Devonshire coast.

We arranged to travel in our own comfortable carriage by post—resting of course at inns on the road at night. In the days before railways it was no easy matter for an invalid to travel from Perthshire to London —even with a light carriage and four horses. Calculating our rate of progress from the date of our departure, I found that we had just time, and no more, to reach London on the last day of the month.

I shall say nothing of the secret anxieties which weighed on my mind, under these circumstances. Happily for me, on every account, my mother's strength held out. The easy, and (as we then thought) the rapid rate of travelling, had its invigorating effect on her nerves. She slept better when we rested for the night than she had slept at home. After twice being delayed on the

road, we arrived in London at three o'clock on the afternoon of the last day of the month. Had I reached my destination in time?

As I interpreted the writing of the apparition, I had still some hours at my disposal. The phrase, 'at the month's end,' meant, as I understood it, at the last hour of the last day in the month. If I took up my position 'under the shadow of St. Paul's' (say), at ten that night, I should arrive at the place of meeting with two hours to spare, before the last stroke of the clock marked the beginning of the new month.

At half-past nine, I left my mother to rest after her long journey, and privately quitted the house. Before ten, I was at my post. The night was fine and clear; and the huge shadow of the cathedral marked distinctly the limits within which I had been bidden to wait, on the watch for events.

The great clock of St. Paul's struck ten —and nothing happened.

The next hour passed very slowly. I walked up and down; at one time absorbed in my own thoughts; at another, engaged in watching the gradual diminution in the number of foot passengers who passed me as the night advanced. The City (as it is called) is the most populous part of London in the daytime. But, at night, when it ceases to be the centre of commerce, its busy population melts away, and the empty streets assume the appearance of a remote and deserted quarter of the metropolis. As the half-hour after ten struck—then the quarter to eleven —then the hour—the pavement steadily became more and more deserted. I could count the foot passengers now by twos and threes; and I could see the places of public refreshment within my view beginning already to close for the night.

I looked at the clock: it pointed to ten minutes past eleven. At that hour, could I hope to meet Mrs. Van Brandt alone, in the public street?

The more I thought of it, the less likely such an event seemed to be. The more reasonable probability was that I might meet her once more, accompanied by some friend —perhaps under the escort of Van Brandt himself. I wondered whether I should preserve my self-control, in the presence of that man, for the second time.

While my thoughts were still pursuing this direction, my attention was recalled to passing events by a sad little voice, putting a strange little question close at my side.

'If you please, sir, do you know where I can find a chemist's shop open at this time of night?'

I looked round, and discovered a poorly

clad little boy, with a basket over his arm, and a morsel of paper in his hand.

'The chemists' shops are all shut,' I said. 'If you want any medicine, you must ring the night-bell.'

'I dursn't do it, sir,' replied the small stranger. 'I am such a little boy, I'm afraid of their beating me if I ring them up out of their beds, without somebody to speak for me.'

The little creature looked at me under the street lamp with such a forlorn experience of being beaten for trifling offences in his face, that it was impossible to resist the impulse to help him.

'Is it a serious case of illness?' I said.

'I don't know, sir.'

'Have you got a doctor's prescription?'

He held out his morsel of paper.

'I have got this,' he said.

I took the paper from him, and looked at it.

It was an ordinary prescription for a tonic mixture. I looked first at the doctor's signature: it was the name of a perfectly obscure person in the profession. Below it was written the name of the patient for whom the medicine had been prescribed. I started as I read it. The name was 'Mrs. Brand.'

The idea instantly struck me that this (so far as sound went, at any rate) was the English equivalent of Brandt.

'Do you know the lady who sent you for the medicine?' I asked.

'Oh, yes, sir! She lodges with mother—and she owes for rent. I have done everything she told me except getting the physic. I've pawned her ring, and I've bought the bread and butter and eggs, and I've taken care of the change. Mother looks to the change for her rent. It isn't my fault, sir, that I've lost myself. I am but ten years

old—and all the chemists' shops are shut up!'

Here my little friend's sense of his unmerited misfortunes overpowered him, and he began to cry.

'Don't cry, my man!' I said: 'I'll help you. Tell me something more about the lady first. Is she alone?'

'She's got her little girl with her, sir.'

My heart quickened its beat. The boy's answer reminded me of that other little girl whom my mother had once seen.

'Is the lady's husband with her?' I asked next.

'No, sir—not now. He was with her; but he went away—and he hasn't come back yet.'

I put a last conclusive question.

'Is her husband an Englishman?' I enquired.

'Mother says he is a foreigner,' the boy answered.

I turned away to hide my agitation. Even the child might have noticed it.

Passing under the name of 'Mrs. Brand' —poor, so poor that she was obliged to pawn her ring—left by a man who was a foreigner, alone with her little girl—was I on the trace of her at that moment? Was this lost child destined to be the innocent means of leading me back to the woman I loved, in her direst need of sympathy and help? The more I thought of it, the more strongly the idea of returning with the boy to the house in which his mother's lodger lived, fastened itself on my mind. The clock struck the quarter past eleven. If my anticipations ended in misleading me I had still three-quarters of an hour to spare, before the month reached its end.

'Where do you live?' I asked.

The boy mentioned a street, the name of which I then heard for the first time. All he could say, when I asked for further particulars, was that he lived close by the river—in which direction he was too confused and too frightened to be able to tell me.

While we were still trying to understand each other, a cab passed slowly at some little distance. I hailed the man, and mentioned the name of the street to him. He knew it perfectly well. The street was rather more than a mile away from us, in an easterly direction. He undertook to drive me there, and to bring me back to St. Paul's (if necessary) in less than twenty minutes. I opened the door of the cab, and told my little friend to get in. The boy hesitated.

'Are we going to the chemist's, if you please, sir?' he asked.

'No. You are going home first, with me.'

The boy began to cry again.

'Mother will beat me, sir, if I go back without the medicine.'

'I will take care that your mother doesn't beat you. I am a doctor myself; and I want to see the lady before we get the medicine for her.'

The announcement of my profession appeared to inspire the boy with a certain confidence. But he still showed no disposition to accompany me to his mother's house.

'Do you mean to charge the lady anything?' he asked. 'The money I've got on the ring isn't much. Mother won't like having it taken out of her rent.'

'I won't charge the lady a farthing,' I answered.

The boy instantly got into the cab. 'All right,' he said, 'as long as mother gets her money.'

Alas for the poor! The child's education in the sordid anxieties of life was completed already at ten years old!

We drove away.

CHAPTER VII.

I KEEP MY APPOINTMENT.

THE poverty-stricken aspect of the street, when we entered it; the dirty and dilapidated condition of the house, when we drew up at the door, would have warned most men, in my position, to prepare themselves for a distressing discovery when they were admitted to the interior of the dwelling. The first impression which the place produced on *my* mind suggested on the contrary that the boy's answers to my questions had led me astray. It was simply impossible to associate Mrs. Van Brandt (as I remembered her) with the spectacle of such squalid poverty as I

now beheld. I rang the door-bell, feeling persuaded beforehand that my enquiries would lead to no useful result.

As I lifted my hand to the bell, my little companion's dread of a beating revived in full force. He hid himself behind me; and when I asked what he was about, he answered confidentially, 'Please stand between us, sir, when mother opens the door!'

A tall and truculent woman answered the bell. No introduction was necessary. Holding a cane in her hand, she stood self-proclaimed as my small friend's mother.

'I thought it was that vagabond of a boy of mine,' she explained, as an apology for the exhibition of the cane. 'He has been gone on an errand more than two hours. What did you please to want, sir?'

I interceded for the unfortunate boy, before I entered on my own business.

'I must beg you to forgive your son, this

time,' I said. 'I found him lost in the streets; and I have brought him home.'

The woman's astonishment when she heard what I had done, and discovered her son behind me, literally struck her dumb. The language of the eye, superseding on this occasion the language of the tongue, plainly revealed the impression that I had produced on her:—'You bring my lost brat home in a cab? Mr. Stranger, you are mad.'

'I hear that you have a lady named Brand lodging in the house,' I went on. 'I dare say I am mistaken in supposing her to be a lady of the same name whom I know. But I should like to make sure whether I am right or wrong. Is it too late to disturb your lodger to-night?'

The woman recovered the use of her tongue.

'My lodger is up and waiting for that little fool, who doesn't know his way about

London yet!' She emphasised those words by shaking her brawny fist at her son—who instantly returned to his place of refuge behind the tail of my coat. 'Have you got the money?' enquired this terrible person, shouting at her hidden offspring over my shoulder. 'Or have you lost *that* as well as your own stupid little self?'

The boy showed himself again, and put the money into his mother's knotty hand. She counted it, with eyes which satisfied themselves fiercely that each coin was of genuine silver—and then became partially pacified.

'Go along upstairs,' she growled, addressing her son; 'and don't keep the lady waiting any longer. They're half-starved, she and her child,' the woman proceeded, turning to me. 'The food my boy has got for them in his basket will be the first food the mother has tasted to-day. She's pawned

everything by this time; and what she's to do unless you help her is more than I can say. The doctor does what he can—but he told me to-day, if she wasn't better nourished it was no use sending for *him*. Follow the boy; and see for yourself if it's the lady you know.'

I listened to the woman, still feeling persuaded that I had acted under a delusion in going to her house. How was it possible to associate the charming object of my heart's worship with the miserable story of destitution which I had just heard? I stopped the boy on the first landing, and told him to announce me simply as a doctor, who had been informed of Mrs. Brand's illness and who had called to see her.

We ascended a second flight of stairs, and a third. Arrived now at the top of the house, the boy knocked at the door that was nearest to us on the landing. No audible

voice replied. He opened the door without ceremony, and went in. I waited outside to hear what was said. The door was left ajar. If the voice of 'Mrs. Brand' was (as I believed it would prove it to be) the voice of a stranger, I resolved to offer her delicately such help as lay within my power, and to return forthwith to my post under 'the shadow of St. Paul's.'

The first voice that spoke to the boy was the voice of a child.

'I'm so hungry, Jemmy—I'm so hungry!'

'All right, missy—I've got you something to eat.'

'Be quick, Jemmy! Be quick!'

There was a momentary pause—and then I heard the boy's voice once more.

'There's a slice of bread-and-butter, Missy. You must wait for your egg till I can boil it. Don't you eat too fast, or you'll

choke yourself. What's the matter with your mamma? Are you asleep, ma'am?'

I could barely hear the answering voice —it was so faint; and it uttered but one word: 'No!'

The boy spoke again.

'Cheer up, Missus. There's a doctor waiting outside to see you.'

This time there was no audible reply. The boy showed himself to me at the door. 'Please to come in, sir. I can't make anything of her.'

It would have been misplaced delicacy to have hesitated any longer to enter the room. I went in.

There, at the opposite end of a miserably furnished bedchamber, lying back feebly in a tattered old arm-chair, was one more among the thousands of forlorn creatures, starving that night in the great city. A white handkerchief was laid over her face as if to

screen it from the flame of the fire hard by. She lifted the handkerchief, startled by the sound of my footsteps as I entered the room. I looked at her, and saw in the white, wan, deathlike face—the face of the woman I loved!

For a moment, the horror of the discovery turned me faint and giddy. In another instant I was kneeling by her chair. My arm was round her—her head lay on my shoulder. She was past speaking, past crying out: she trembled silently, and that was all. I said nothing. No words passed my lips, no tears came to my relief. I held her to me; and she let me hold her. The child devouring its bread and butter at a little round table, stared at us. The boy, on his knees before the grate, stared at us. And the slow minutes lagged on—and the buzzing of a fly in a corner was the only sound in the room.

The instincts of the profession to which I had been trained, rather than any active sense of the horror of the situation in which I was placed, roused me at last. She was starving! I saw it in the deadly colour of her skin; I felt it in the faint quick flutter of her pulse. I called the boy to me; and sent him to the nearest public-house for wine and biscuits. 'Be quick about it,' I said, 'and you shall have more money for yourself than ever you had in your life!' The boy looked at me—spat on the coins in his hand—said, 'That's for luck!'—and ran out of the room as never boy ran yet.

I turned to speak my first words of comfort to the mother. The cry of the child stopped me.

'I'm so hungry! I'm so hungry!'

I set more food before the famished child, and kissed her. She looked up at me with wondering eyes.

'Are you a new papa?' the little creature asked. 'My other papa never kisses me.'

I looked at the mother. Her eyes were closed; the tears flowed slowly over her worn white cheeks. I took her frail hand in mine. 'Happier days are coming,' I said; 'you are *my* care now.' There was no answer. She still trembled silently—and that was all.

In less than five minutes the boy returned, and earned his promised reward. He sat on the floor by the fire counting his treasure, the one happy creature in the room. I soaked some crumbled morsels of biscuit in the wine—and, little by little, I revived her failing strength by nourishment administered at intervals in that cautious form. After awhile she raised her head, and looked at me, with wondering eyes that were pitiably like the eyes of her child. A faint delicate flush began to show itself in her face. She spoke

to me, for the first time, in whispering tones that I could just hear as I sat close at her side.

'How did you find me? Who showed you the way to this place?'

She paused; painfully recalling the memory of something that was slow to come back. Her colour deepened; she found the lost remembrance, and looked at me with a timid curiosity. 'What brought you here?' she asked. 'Was it my dream?'

'Wait, dearest, till you are stronger; and I will tell you all.'

I lifted her gently, and laid her on the wretched bed. The child followed us, and, climbing to the bedstead with my help, nestled at her mother's side. I sent the boy away to tell the mistress of the house that I should remain with my patient, watching her progress towards recovery, through the night. He went out, jingling his money

joyfully in his pocket. We three were left together.

As the long hours followed each other, she fell at intervals into a broken sleep; waking with a start, and looking at me wildly as if I had been a stranger at her bedside. Towards morning, the nourishment which I still carefully administered wrought its healthful change in her pulse, and composed her to quieter slumbers. When the sun rose she was sleeping as peacefully as the child at her side. I was able to leave her, until my return later in the day, under the care of the woman of the house. The magic of money transformed this termagant and terrible person into a docile and attentive nurse—so eager to follow my instructions exactly that she begged me to commit them to writing before I went away. For a moment, I still lingered alone at the bedside of the sleeping woman; and satisfied myself for the hun-

dredth time that her life was safe, before I left her. It was the sweetest of all rewards to feel sure of this—to touch her cool forehead lightly with my lips—to look, and look again, at the poor worn face, always dear, always beautiful, to *my* eyes, change as it might. I closed the door softly, and went out in the bright morning, a happy man again. So close together rise the springs of joy and sorrow in human life! So near in our heart, as in our heaven, is the brightest sunshine to the blackest cloud!

CHAPTER VIII.

CONVERSATION WITH MY MOTHER.

I REACHED my own house in time to snatch two or three hours of repose, before I paid my customary morning visit to my mother in her own room. I observed in her reception of me, on this occasion, certain peculiarities of look and manner which were far from being familiar in my experience of her.

When our eyes first met, she regarded me with a wistful questioning look, as if she was troubled by some doubt which she shrank from expressing in words. And, when I enquired after her health as usual, she surprised me by answering as impatiently as if

she resented my having mentioned the subject. For a moment, I was inclined to think these changes signified that she had discovered my absence from home during the night, and that she had some suspicion of the true cause of it. But she never alluded, even in the most distant manner, to Mrs. Van Brandt; and not a word dropped from her lips which implied, directly or indirectly, that I had pained or disappointed her. I could only conclude that she had something important to say, in relation to herself or to me—and that for reasons of her own she abstained from giving expression to it for the present.

Reverting to our ordinary topics of conversation, we touched on the subject (always interesting to my mother) of my visit to Shetland. Speaking of this, we naturally spoke also of Miss Dunross. Here again, when I least expected it, there was another surprise in store for me.

'You were talking, the other day,' said my mother, 'of the green flag which poor Dermody's daughter worked for you, when you were both children. Have you really kept it all this time?'

'Yes.'

'Where have you left it? In Scotland?'

'I have brought it with me to London.'

'Why?'

I mentioned the promise which I had given to Miss Dunross.

My mother smiled.

'Is it possible, George, that you think about this as the young lady in Shetland thinks? After all the years that have passed, do you believe in the green flag being the means of bringing Mary Dermody and yourself together again?'

'Certainly not! I am only humouring one of the fancies of poor Miss Dunross. Could I refuse to grant her trifling

request, after all I owed to her kindness?'

The smile left my mother's face. She looked at me attentively.

'Miss Dunross seems to have produced a very favourable impression on you,' she said.

'I own it. I feel deeply interested in her.'

'If she had not been an incurable invalid, George, I too might have become interested in Miss Dunross—perhaps in the character of my daughter-in-law?'

'It is useless, mother, to speculate on what *might* have happened. The sad reality is enough.'

My mother paused a little, before she put her next question to me.

'Did Miss Dunross always keep her veil drawn, in your presence, when there happened to be a light in the room?'

'Always.'

'She never even let you catch a momentary glance at her face?'

'Never.'

'And the only reason she gave you was that the light caused her a painful sensation if it fell on her uncovered skin?'

'You say that, mother, as if you doubt whether Miss Dunross told me the truth.'

'No, George. I only doubt whether she told you *all* the truth.'

'What do you mean?'

'Don't be offended, my dear. I believe Miss Dunross has some more serious reason for keeping her face hidden than the reason that she gave *you*.'

I was silent. The suspicion which those words implied had never occurred to my mind. I had read in medical books of cases of morbid nervous sensitiveness exactly similar to the case of Miss Dunross, as described

by herself—and that had been enough for me. Now that my mother's idea had found its way from her mind to mine, the impression produced on me was painful in the last degree. Horrible imaginings of deformity possessed my brain, and profaned all that was purest and dearest in my recollections of Miss Dunross. It was useless to change the subject—the evil influence that was on me was too potent to be charmed away by talk. Making the best excuse that I could think of for leaving my mother's room, I hurried away to seek a refuge from myself, where alone I could hope to find it, in the presence of Mrs. Van Brandt.

CHAPTER IX.

CONVERSATION WITH MRS. VAN BRANDT.

THE landlady was taking the air at her own door, when I reached the house. Her reply to my enquiries justified my most hopeful anticipations. The poor lodger looked already 'like another woman;' and the child was at that moment posted on the stairs, watching for the return of her 'new papa.'

'There's one thing I should wish to say to you, sir, before you go up stairs,' the woman went on. 'Don't trust the lady with more money, at a time, than the money that is wanted for the day's housekeeping. If she has any to spare, it's as likely as not to be wasted on her good-for-nothing husband.'

Absorbed in the higher and dearer interests that filled my mind, I had thus far forgotten the very existence of Mr. Van Brandt.

'Where is he?' I asked.

'Where he ought to be,' was the answer. 'In prison for debt.'

In those days, a man imprisoned for debt was not infrequently a man imprisoned for life. There was little fear of my visit being shortened by the appearance on the scene of Mr. Van Brandt.

Ascending the stairs, I found the child waiting for me on the upper landing, with a ragged doll in her arms. I had bought a cake for her on my way to the house. She forthwith turned over the doll to my care, and, trotting before me into the room with her cake in her arms, announced my arrival in these words :

'Mamma, I like this papa better than the other. You like him better too.'

The mother's wasted face reddened for a moment, then turned pale again, as she held out her hand to me. I looked at her anxiously, and discerned the welcome signs of recovery, clearly revealed. Her grand grey eyes rested on me again with a glimmer of their old light. The hand that had lain so cold in mine on the past night had life and warmth in it now.

'Should I have died before the morning, if you had not come here?' she asked softly. 'Have you saved my life for the second time? I can well believe it!'

Before I was aware of her, she bent her head over my hand, and touched it tenderly with her lips. 'I am not an ungrateful woman,' she murmured—'and yet, I don't know how to thank you.'

The child looked up quickly from her

cake. 'Why don't you kiss him?' the quaint little creature asked, with a broad stare of astonishment.

Her head sank on her breast. She sighed bitterly.

'No more of Me!' she said, suddenly recovering her composure, and suddenly forcing herself to look at me again. 'Tell me what happy chance brought you here last night?'

'The same chance,' I answered, 'which took me to Saint Anthony's Well.'

She raised herself eagerly in the chair.

'You have seen me again—as you saw me in the summer-house by the waterfall!' she exclaimed. 'Was it in Scotland once more?'

'No. Farther away than Scotland—as far away as Shetland.'

'Tell me about it! Pray, pray tell me about it!'

I related what had happened as exactly as I could—consistently with maintaining the strictest reserve on one point. Discreetly concealing the existence of Miss Dunross, I left her to suppose that the master of the house was the one person whom I had found to receive me, during my sojourn under Mr. Dunross's roof.

'That is strange!' she exclaimed, after she had heard me attentively to the end.

'What is strange?' I asked.

She hesitated, searching my face earnestly with her large grave eyes.

'I hardly like speaking of it,' she said. 'And yet I ought to have no concealments, in such a matter, from you. I understand everything that you have told me—with one exception. It seems strange to me that you should only have had one old man for your companion while you were at the house in Shetland.'

'What other companion did you expect to hear of?' I enquired.

'I expected,' she answered, 'to hear of a lady in the house.'

I cannot positively say that the reply took me by surprise: it forced me to reflect before I spoke again. I knew, by my past experience, that she must have seen me, in my absence from her, while I was spiritually present to her mind in a trance or dream. Had she also seen the daily companion of my life in Shetland—Miss Dunross?

I put the question in a form which left me free to decide whether I should take her unreservedly into my confidence or not.

'Am I right,' I began, 'in supposing that you dreamed of me in Shetland, as you once before dreamed of me when I happened to be in Scotland?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'It was at the close of evening, this time. I fell asleep, or

became insensible—I cannot say which. And I saw you again, in a vision or a dream.'

'Where did you see me?'

'I first saw you on the bridge over the Scotch river—just as we both met on the evening when you saved my life. After awhile, the stream and the landscape about it, faded, and you faded with them, into darkness. I waited a little—and the darkness melted away slowly. I stood, as it seemed to me, in a circle of starry light; fronting a window, with a lake behind me, and before me a darkened room. And I looked into the room, and the starry light showed you to me again.'

'When did this happen? Do you remember the date?'

'I remember that it was at the beginning of the month. The misfortunes which have since brought me so low, had not then fallen

on me—and yet, as I stood looking at you, I had the strangest prevision of calamity that was to come. I felt the same absolute reliance on your power to help me that I felt when I first dreamed of you in Scotland. And I did the same familiar things. I laid my hand on your bosom. I said to you, "Remember me. Come to me." I even wrote——'

She stopped, shuddering, as if a sudden fear had laid its hold on her. Seeing this, and dreading the effect of any violent agitation, I hastened to suggest that we should say no more, for that day, on the subject of her dream.

'No,' she answered firmly. 'There is nothing to be gained by giving me time. My dream has left one horrible remembrance on my mind. As long as I live, I believe I shall tremble when I think of what I saw near you, in that darkened room.'

She stopped again. Was she approaching the subject of the shrouded figure, with the black veil over its head? Was she about to describe her first discovery, in the dream, of Miss Dunross?

'Tell me one thing first,' she resumed. 'Have I been right in what I have said to you, so far? Is it true that you were in a darkened room, when you saw me?'

'Quite true.'

'Was the date the beginning of the month? and was the hour the close of evening?'

'Yes.'

'Were you alone in the room? Answer me truly!'

'I was not alone.'

'Was the master of the house with you? or had you some other companion?'

It would have been worse than useless

(after what I had now heard) to attempt to deceive her.

'I had another companion,' I answered. 'The person in the room with me was a woman.'

Her face showed, as I spoke, that she was again shaken by the terrifying recollection to which she had just alluded. I had, by this time, some difficulty myself in preserving my composure. Still, I was determined not to let a word escape me which could operate as a suggestion on the mind of my companion.

'Have you any other question to ask me?' was all I said.

'One more,' she answered. 'Was there anything unusual in the dress of your companion?'

'Yes. She wore a long black veil, which hung over her head and face, and dropped to below her waist.'

Mrs. Van Brandt leaned back in her chair, composing herself before she spoke again.

'I understand your motive for concealing from me the presence of that miserable woman in the house,' she said. 'It is good and kind like all your motives; but it is useless. While I lay in the trance I saw everything exactly as it was in the reality; and I, too, saw that frightful face!'

Those words literally electrified me.

My conversation of that morning with my mother instantly recurred to my memory. I started to my feet.

'Good God!' I exclaimed, 'what do you mean?'

'Don't you understand yet?' she asked, in amazement on her side. 'Must I speak more plainly still? When you saw the apparition of me, did you see me write?'

'Yes. On a letter that the lady was

writing for me. I saw the words afterwards; the words that brought me to you last night: —At the month's end. In the shadow of Saint Paul's.'

'How did I appear to write on the un finished letter?'

'You lifted the writing-case, on which the letter and the pen lay, off the lady's lap; and, while you wrote, you rested the case on her shoulder.'

'Did you notice if the lifting of the case produced any effect on her?'

'I saw no effect produced. She remained immovable in her chair.'

'I saw it differently in my dream. She raised her hand—not the hand that was nearest to you, but nearest to me. As *I* lifted the writing-case, *she* lifted her hand, and parted the folds of the veil from off her face—I suppose to see more clearly. It was only for a moment; and, in that moment, I

saw what the veil hid. Don't let us speak of it! You must have shuddered at that frightful sight in the reality, as I shuddered at it in the dream. You must have asked yourself, as I did: Is there nobody to poison the terrible creature, and hide her mercifully in the grave?'

At those words, she abruptly checked herself. I could say nothing—my face spoke for me. She saw it, and guessed the truth.

'Good heavens!' she cried. 'You have *not* seen her! She must have kept her face hidden from you behind the veil! Oh, why, why did you cheat me into talking of it? I will never speak of it again. See, we are frightening the child! Come here, darling; there is nothing to be afraid of. Come, and bring your cake with you. You shall be a great lady, giving a grand dinner; and we will be two friends whom you have invited to dine with you; and the doll shall be the

little girl who comes in after dinner, and has fruit at dessert!' So she ran on, trying vainly to forget the shock that she had inflicted on me, in talking nursery nonsense to the child.

Recovering my composure in some degree, I did my best to second the effort that she had made. My quieter thoughts suggested that she might well be self-deceived in believing the horrible spectacle presented to her in the vision to be an actual reflection of the truth. In common justice towards Miss Dunross, I ought surely not to accept the conviction of her deformity on no better evidence than the evidence of a dream? Reasonable as it undoubtedly was, this view left certain doubts still lingering in my mind. The child's instinct soon discovered that her mother and I were playfellows who felt no genuine enjoyment of the game. She dismissed her make-believe guests without

ceremony, and went back with her doll to the favourite play-ground on which I had met her—the landing outside the door. No persuasion on her mother's part or on mine, succeeded in luring her back to us. We were left together, to face each other as best we might—with the forbidden subject of Miss Dunross between us.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE AND MONEY.

FEELING the embarrassment of the moment most painfully on her side, Mrs. Van Brandt spoke first.

'You have said nothing to me about yourself,' she began. 'Is your life a happier one than it was when we last met?'

'I cannot honestly say that it is,' I answered.

'Is there any prospect of your being married?'

'My prospect of being married still rests with you.'

'Don't say that!' she exclaimed, with

an entreating look at me. 'Don't spoil my pleasure in seeing you again, by speaking of what can never be! Have you still to be told how it is that you find me here alone with my child?'

I forced myself to mention Van Brandt's name, rather than hear it pass *her* lips.

'I have been told that Mr. Van Brandt is in prison for debt,' I said. 'And I saw for myself last night that he had left you helpless.'

'He left me the little money he had with him when he was arrested,' she rejoined sadly. 'His cruel creditors are more to blame than he is for the poverty that has fallen on us.'

Even this negative defence of Van Brandt stung me to the quick.

'I ought to have spoken more guardedly of him,' I said bitterly. 'I ought to have remembered that a woman can forgive al-

most any wrong that a man can inflict on her—when he is the man whom she loves.'

She put her hand on my mouth, and stopped me before I could say any more.

'How can you speak so cruelly to me?' she asked. 'You know—to my shame I confessed it to you the last time we met—you know that my heart, in secret, is all yours. What "wrong" are you talking of? Is it the wrong I suffered when Van Brandt married me, with a wife living at the time (and living still)? Do you think I can ever forget the great misfortune of my life—the misfortune that has made me unworthy of you? It is no fault of mine—God knows—but it is not the less true that I am not married, and that the little darling who is playing out there with her doll is my child. And you talk of my being your wife—knowing that!'

'The child accepts me as her second

father,' I said. 'It would be better and happier for us both, if you had as little pride as the child.'

'Pride?' she repeated. 'In such a position as mine? A helpless woman, with a mock-husband in prison for debt! Say that I have not fallen quite so low yet as to forget what is due to you—and you will pay me a compliment that will be nearer to the truth. Am I to marry you for my food and shelter? Am I to marry you, because there is no lawful tie that binds me to the father of my child? Cruelly as he has behaved, he has still *that* claim upon me. Bad as he is, he has not forsaken me; he has been forced away. My only friend! is it possible that you think me ungrateful enough to consent to be your wife? The woman (in my situation) must be heartless indeed who could destroy your place in the estimation of the world, and the regard of your friends!

The wretchedest creature that walks the streets would shrink from treating you in that way. Oh! what are men made of? How *can* you—how *can* you speak of it!'

I yielded—and spoke of it no more. Every word she uttered only increased my admiration of the noble creature whom I had loved, and lost. What refuge was now left to me? But one refuge; I could still offer to her the sacrifice of myself. Bitterly as I hated the man who had parted us, I loved her dearly enough to be even capable of helping him, for her sake. Hopeless infatuation! I don't deny it; I don't excuse it—hopeless infatuation!

'Forgive me,' I said sadly; 'and let me deserve to be forgiven. It is something to be your only friend. You must have plans for the future—tell me unreservedly how I can help you.'

'Complete the good work that you have

begun,' she answered gratefully. 'Help me back to health. Make me strong enough to submit to a doctor's estimate of my chances of living for some years yet.'

'A doctor's estimate of your chances of living?' I repeated. 'What do you mean?'

'I hardly know how to tell you,' she said, 'without speaking again of Mr. Van Brandt.'

'Does speaking of him again mean speaking of his debts?' I asked. 'Why need you hesitate? You know that there is nothing I will not do to relieve *your* anxieties.'

She looked at me for a moment, in silent distress.

'Oh! do you think I would let you give your money to Van Brandt?' she asked as soon as she could speak. 'I, who owe everything to your devotion to me? Never! Let me tell you the plain truth There is a serious necessity for his getting

out of prison. He must pay his creditors; and he has found out a way of doing it—with my help.'

'Your help!' I exclaimed.

'Yes! This is his position, in two words. A little while since, he obtained an excellent offer of employment abroad, from a rich relative of his; and he had made all his arrangements to accept it. Unhappily, he returned to tell me of his good fortune; and the same day he was arrested for debt. His relative has offered to keep the situation open for a certain time—and the time has not yet expired. If he can pay a dividend to his creditors they will give him his freedom; and he believes he can raise the money if I consent to insure my life.'

To insure her life! The snare that had been set for her was plainly revealed in those four words.

In the eye of the law, she was of course

a single woman : she was of age, she was to all intents and purposes her own mistress. What was there to prevent her from insuring her life, if she pleased, and from so disposing of the insurance as to give Van Brandt a direct interest in her death ? Knowing what I knew of him, believing him as I did to be capable of any atrocity, I trembled at the bare idea of what might have happened, if I had failed to find my way back to her until a later date. Thanks to the happy accident of my position, the one certain way of protecting her lay easily within my reach. I could offer to lend the scoundrel the money that he wanted, at an hour's notice—and he was the man to accept my proposal quite as easily as I could make it.

'You don't seem to approve of our idea,' she said, noticing in evident perplexity the effect which she had produced on me. 'I am very unfortunate—I seem to have inno-

cently disturbed and annoyed you for the second time.'

'You are quite mistaken,' I replied. 'I am only doubting whether your plan for relieving Mr. Van Brandt of his embarrassments is quite so simple as you suppose. Are you aware of the delays that are likely to take place, before it will be possible to borrow money on your policy of insurance?'

'I know nothing about it,' she said sadly.

'Will you let me ask the advice of my lawyers? They are trustworthy and experienced men—and I am sure they can be of use to you.'

Cautiously as I had expressed myself, her delicacy took the alarm.

'Promise that you won't ask me to borrow money of you for Mr. Van Brandt,' she rejoined; 'and I will accept your help gratefully.'

I could honestly promise that. My one

chance of saving her lay in keeping from her knowledge the course that I had now determined to pursue. I rose to go, while my resolution still sustained me. The sooner I made my enquiries (I reminded her), the more speedily our present doubts and difficulties would be resolved.

She rose, as I rose—with the tears in her eyes and the blush on her cheeks.

'Kiss me,' she whispered, 'before you go! And don't mind my crying. I am quite happy now. It is only your goodness that overpowers me.'

I pressed her to my heart, with the unacknowledged tenderness of a parting embrace. It was impossible to disguise the position in which I had now placed myself —I had, so to speak, pronounced my own sentence of banishment. When my interference had restored my unworthy rival to his freedom, could I submit to the degrading

necessity of seeing her in his presence, of speaking to her under his eyes? *That* sacrifice of myself was beyond me—and I knew it. 'For the last time!' I thought, as I held her to me for a moment longer—'for the last time!'

The child ran to meet me with open arms, when I stepped out on the landing. My manhood had sustained me through the parting with the mother. It was only when the child's round innocent little face laid itself lovingly against mine that my fortitude gave way. I was past speaking—I put her down gently in silence, and waited on the lower flight of stairs until I was fit to face the world outside.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR DESTINIES PART US.

DESCENDING to the ground floor of the house, I sent to request a moment's interview with the landlady. I had yet to learn in which of the London prisons Van Brandt was confined; and she was the only person to whom I could venture to address the question.

Having answered my enquiries, the woman put her own sordid construction on my motive for visiting the prisoner.

'Has the money you left upstairs gone into his greedy pockets already?' she asked. 'If I was as rich as you are, I should let it go. In your place, I wouldn't touch him with a pair of tongs!'

The woman's coarse warning actually proved useful to me—it started a new idea in my mind! Before she spoke, I had been too dull or too pre-occupied to see that it was quite needless to degrade myself by personally communicating with Van Brandt in his prison. It only now occurred to me that my legal advisers were, as a matter of course, the proper persons to represent me in the matter—with this additional advantage, that they could keep my share in the transaction a secret even from Van Brandt himself.

I drove at once to the office of my lawyers. The senior partner—the tried friend and adviser of our family—received me.

My instructions naturally enough astonished him. He was immediately to satisfy the prisoner's creditors, on my behalf, without mentioning my name to anyone. And he was gravely to accept as security for repayment—Mr. Van Brandt's note of hand.

'I thought I was well acquainted with the various methods by which a gentleman can throw away his money,' the senior partner remarked. 'I congratulate you, Mr. Germaine, on having discovered an entirely new way of effectually emptying your purse. Founding a newspaper, taking a theatre, keeping race-horses, gambling at Monaco—are highly efficient as modes of losing money. But they all yield, sir, to paying the debts of Mr. Van Brandt!'

I left him, and went home.

The servant who opened the door had a message for me from my mother. She wished to see me as soon as I was at leisure to speak to her.

I presented myself at once in my mother's sitting-room.

'Well, George?' she said, without a word to prepare me for what was coming. 'How have you left Mrs. Van Brandt?'

I was completely thrown off my guard.

'Who has told you that I have seen Mrs. Van Brandt?' I asked.

'My dear! your face has told me. Don't I know by this time, how you look and how you speak when Mrs. Van Brandt is in your mind? Sit down by me. I have something to say to you, which I wanted to say this morning—but, I hardly know why, my heart failed me. I am bolder now; and I can say it. My son! you still love Mrs. Van Brandt. You have my permission to marry her.'

Those were the words! Hardly an hour had elapsed since Mrs. Van Brandt's own lips had told me that our union was impossible. Not even half an hour had passed, since I had given the directions which would restore to liberty the man who was the one obstacle to my marriage. And this was the time that my mother had innocently chosen

for consenting to receive as her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Van Brandt!

'I see that I surprise you,' she resumed. 'Let me explain my motives as plainly as I can. I should not be speaking the truth, George, if I told you that I had ceased to feel the serious objections that there are to your marrying this lady. The only difference in my way of thinking is, that I am now willing to set my objections aside, out of regard for your happiness. I am an old woman, my dear. In the course of Nature I cannot hope to be with you much longer. When I am gone, who will be left to care for you and love you, in the place of your mother? No one will be left—unless you marry Mrs. Van Brandt. Your happiness is my first consideration; and the woman you love (sadly as she has been led astray) is a woman worthy of a better fate. Marry her.'

I could not trust myself to speak. I

could only kneel at my mother's feet, and hide my face on her knees, as if I had been a boy again.

'Think of it, George,' she said. 'And come back to me when you are composed enough to speak as quietly of the future as I do.'

She lifted my head, and kissed me. As I rose to leave her, I saw something in the dear old eyes that met mine so tenderly, which struck a sudden fear through me—keen and cutting like a stroke from a knife.

The moment I had closed the door, I went downstairs to the porter in the hall.

'Has my mother left the house,' I asked, 'while I have been away?'

'No, sir.'

'Have any visitors called?'

'One visitor has called, sir.'

'Do you know who it was?'

The porter mentioned the name of a

celebrated physician—a man at the head of his profession, in those days. I instantly took my hat, and went to his house.

He had just returned from his round of visits. My card was taken to him, and was followed at once by my admission to his consulting-room.

'You have seen my mother,' I said. 'Is she seriously ill—and have you not concealed it from her? For God's sake tell me the truth; I can bear it.'

The great man took me kindly by the hand.

'Your mother stands in no need of any warning; she is herself aware of the critical state of her health,' he said. 'She sent for me to confirm her own conviction. I could not conceal from her—I must not conceal from you—that the vital energies are sinking. She may live for some months longer in a milder air than the air of London. That is

all I can say. At her age, her days are numbered.'

He gave me time to steady myself under the blow; and then he placed his vast experience, his matured and consummate knowledge, at my disposal. From his dictation, I committed to writing the necessary instructions for watching over the frail tenure of my mother's life.

'Let me give you one word of warning,' he said, as we parted. 'Your mother is especially desirous that you should know nothing of the precarious condition of her health. Her one anxiety is to see you happy. If she discovers your visit to me, I will not answer for the consequences. Make the best excuse you can think of for at once taking her away from London—and, whatever you may feel in secret, keep up an appearance of good spirits in her presence.'

That evening I made my excuse. It was

easily found. I had only to tell my poor mother of Mrs. Van Brandt's refusal to marry me; and there was an intelligible motive assigned for my proposing to leave London. The same night I wrote to inform Mrs. Van Brandt of the sad event which was the cause of my sudden departure, and to warn her that there no longer existed the slightest necessity for insuring her life. 'My lawyers' (I wrote) 'have undertaken to arrange Mr. Van Brandt's affairs immediately. In a few hours he will be at liberty to accept the situation that has been offered to him.' The last lines of the letter assured her of my unalterable love, and entreated her to write to me before she left England.

This done, all was done. I was conscious, strange to say, of no acutely painful suffering at this saddest time of my life. There is a limit, morally as well as physically, to our capacity for endurance. I can only describe

my sensations under the calamities that had now fallen on me, in one way—I felt like a man whose mind had been stunned.

The next day, my mother and I set forth on the first stage of our journey to the south coast of Devonshire.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLANCE BACKWARDS.

THREE days after we had comfortably established ourselves at Torquay, I received Mrs. Van Brandt's answer to my letter. After the opening sentences (informing me that Van Brandt had been set at liberty, under circumstances painfully suggestive to the writer of some unacknowledged sacrifice on my part), the letter proceeded in these terms:—

'The new employment which Mr. Van Brandt is to undertake secures to us the comforts, if not the luxuries, of life. For the first time since my troubles began, I have

the prospect before me of a peaceful existence, among a foreign people from whom all that is false in my position may be concealed—not for my sake, but for the sake of my child. To more than this, to the happiness which some women enjoy, I must not, I dare not, aspire.

'We leave for the Continent early to-morrow morning. Shall I tell you in what part of Europe my new residence is to be?

'No! You might write to me again; and I might write back. The one return I can make to the good angel of my life, is to help him to forget me. What right have I to cling to my usurped place in your regard? The time will come when you will give your heart to a woman who is worthier of it than I am. Let me drop out of your life—except as an occasional remembrance, when you sometimes think of the days that have gone for ever.

'I shall not be without some consolation on my side, when I too look back at the past. I have been a better woman since I met with you. Live as long as I may, I shall always remember that.

'Yes! the influence that you have had over me has been from first to last an influence for good. Allowing that I have done wrong (in my position) to love you—and worse even than that, to own it—still the love has been innocent, and the effort to control it has been an honest effort at least. But, apart from this, my heart tells me that I am the better for the sympathy which has united us. I may confess to you what I have never yet acknowledged—now that we are so widely-parted, and so little likely ever to meet again. Whenever I have given myself up unrestrainedly to my own better impulses, they have always seemed to lead me to You. Whenever my mind has been most truly at

peace, and I have been able to pray with a pure and a penitent heart, I have felt as if there was some unseen tie that was drawing us nearer and nearer together. And, strange to say, this has always happened to me (just as my dreams of you have always come to me) when I have been separated from Van Brandt. At such times, thinking or dreaming, it has always appeared to me that I knew you far more familiarly than I know you when we meet face to face. Is there really such a thing, I wonder, as a former state of existence? And were we once constant companions in some other sphere, thousands of years since? These are idle guesses! Let it be enough for me to remember that I have been the better for knowing you—without enquiring how or why.

'Farewell, my beloved benefactor, my only friend! The child sends you a kiss;

and the mother signs herself your grateful and affectionate,

'M. VAN BRANDT.'

When I first read those lines, they once more recalled to my memory—very strangely as I then thought—the predictions of Dame Dermody in the days of my boyhood. Here were the foretold sympathies which were spiritually to unite me to Mary, realised by a stranger whom I had met by chance in the later years of my life!

Thinking in this direction, did I advance no farther? Not a step farther? Not a suspicion of the truth presented itself to my mind, even yet.

Was my own dullness of apprehension to blame for this? Would another man, in my position, have discovered what I failed to see?

I look back along the chain of events

which runs through my narrative; and I ask myself, Where are the possibilities to be found—in my case, or in the case of any other man—of identifying the child who was Mary Dermody with the woman who was Mrs. Van Brandt? Was there anything left in our faces, when we met again by the Scotch river, to remind us of our younger selves? We had developed, in the interval, from boy and girl, to man and woman: no outward traces were discernible in us of the George and Mary of other days. Disguised from each other by our faces, we were also disguised by our names. Her mock-marriage had changed her surname. My stepfather's Will had changed mine. Her Christian name was the commonest of all names of women; and mine was almost as far from being remarkable among the names of men. Turning next to the various occasions on which we had met, had we seen enough of each

other to drift into recognition on either side, in the ordinary course of talk? We had met but four times in all: once on the bridge, once again in Edinburgh, twice more in London. On each of these occasions the absorbing anxieties and interests of the passing moment had filled her mind and mine, had inspired her words and mine. When had the events which brought us together, left us with leisure enough and tranquillity enough to look back idly through our lives, and calmly to compare the recollections of our youth? Never! From first to last, the course of events had borne us farther and farther away from any result that could have led even to a suspicion of the truth. She could only believe when she wrote to me on leaving England, and I could only believe when I read her letter, that we had first met at the river, and that our divergent destinies had ended in parting us for ever.

Reading her farewell letter in later days, by the light of my matured experience, I note how remarkably Dame Dermody's faith in the purity of the tie that united us, as kindred spirits, was justified by the result.

It was only when my unknown Mary was parted from Van Brandt—in other words, it was only when she was a pure spirit—that she felt my influence over her as a refining influence on her life, and that the apparition of her communicated with me in the visible and perfect likeness of herself. On my side, when was it that I dreamed of her (as in Scotland), or felt the mysterious warning of her presence in my waking moments (as in Shetland)? Always at the time when my heart opened most tenderly towards her and towards others—when my mind was most free from the bitter doubts, the self-seeking aspirations, which degrade the divinity within us. Then, and then only,

my sympathy with her was the perfect sympathy which holds its fidelity unassailable by the chances and changes, the delusions and temptations of mortal life.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS DUNROSS.

ABSORBED in watching over the closing days of my mother's life, I found in devoting myself to this sacred duty my only consolation under the overthrow of my last hope of marriage with Mrs. Van Brandt.

By degrees, my mother felt the reviving influences of a quiet life and a soft air. The improvement in her health could, as I but too well knew, be only an improvement for a time. Still, it was a relief to see her free from pain, and innocently happy in the presence of her son. Excepting those hours of the day and night which were dedicated to repose, I was never away from her. To

this day, I remember with a tenderness which attaches to no other memories of mine, the books that I read to her, the sunny corner on the seashore where I sat with her, the games of cards that we played together, the little trivial gossip that amused her when she was strong enough for nothing else. These are my imperishable relics; these are the deeds of my life that I shall love best to look back on, when the all-enfolding shadows of death are closing round me.

In the hours when I was alone, my thoughts—occupying themselves mostly among the persons and events of the past—wandered back many and many a time to Shetland and Miss Dunross.

My haunting doubt as to what the black veil had really hidden from me, was no longer accompanied by a feeling of horror when it now recurred to my mind. The more vividly my later remembrances of Miss

Dunross were associated with the idea of an unutterable bodily affliction, the higher the noble nature of the woman seemed to rise in my esteem.

For the first time since I had left Shetland, the temptation now came to me to disregard the injunction which her father had laid on me at parting. When I thought again of the stolen kiss, in the dead of night; when I recalled the appearance of the frail white hand, waving to me through the dark curtains its last farewell—and when there mingled with these memories the later remembrance of what my mother had suspected, and of what Mrs. Van Brandt had seen in her dream—the longing in me to find a means of assuring Miss Dunross that she still had her place apart in my memory and my heart, was more than mortal fortitude could resist. I was pledged in honour not to return to Shetland, and not to write.

How to communicate with her secretly, in some other way, was the constant question in my mind, as the days went on. A hint to enlighten me was all that I wanted—and, as the irony of circumstances ordered it, my mother was the person who gave me the hint.

We still spoke at intervals of Mrs. Van Brandt. Watching me on those occasions when we were in the company of acquaintances at Torquay, my mother plainly discerned that no other woman, whatever her attractions might be, could take the place in my heart of the woman whom I had lost. Seeing but one prospect of happiness for me, she refused to abandon the idea of my marrying Mrs. Van Brandt. When a woman has owned that she loves a man (so my mother used to express her opinion) it is that man's fault, no matter what the obstacles may be, if he fails to make her his

wife. Reverting to this view in various ways, she pressed it on my consideration one day, in these words :

'There is one drawback, George, to my happiness in being here with you. I am an obstacle in the way of your communicating with Mrs. Van Brandt.'

'You forget,' I said, 'that she has left England, without telling me where to find her.'

'If you were free from the incumbrance of your mother, my dear, you could easily find her. Even as things are, you might surely write to her? Don't mistake my motives, George! If I had any hope of your forgetting her—if I saw you only moderately attracted by one or other of the charming women whom we know here—I should say let us never speak again, or think again, of Mrs. Van Brandt. But, my dear, your heart is closed to every woman but one. Be happy in your own way, and let me see it

before I die. The wretch to whom that poor creature is sacrificing her life, will sooner or later ill-treat her, or desert her—and then she must turn to you. Don't let her think you are resigned to the loss of her. The more resolutely you set her scruples at defiance, the more she will love and admire you in secret. Women are like that. Send her a letter—and follow it with a little present. You talked of taking me to the studio of the young artist here, who left his card the other day. I am told that he paints admirable portraits in miniature. Why not send your portrait to Mrs. Van Brandt?'

Here was the idea of which I had been vainly in search! Quite superfluous as a method of pleading my cause with Mrs. Van Brandt, the portrait offered the best of all means of communicating with Miss Dunross—without absolutely violating the engagement to which her father had pledged me. In this

way, without writing a word, without even sending a message, I might tell her how gratefully she was remembered; I might remind her of me tenderly in the bitterest moments of her sad and solitary life.

The same day, I went to the artist privately. The sittings were afterwards continued during the hours while my mother was resting in her room, until the portrait was completed. I caused it to be enclosed in a plain gold locket, with a chain attached; and I forwarded my gift, in the first instance, to the one person whom I could trust to assist me in arranging for the conveyance of it to its destination. This was the old friend (alluded to in these pages as 'Sir James') who had taken me with him to Shetland in the Government yacht.

I had no reason, in writing the necessary explanations, to express myself to Sir James with any reserve. On the voyage back, we

had more than once spoken together confidentially of Miss Dunross. Sir James had heard her sad story from the resident medical man at Lerwick, who had been an old companion of his in their college days. Requesting him to confide my gift to this gentleman, I did not hesitate to acknowledge the doubt that oppressed me, in relation to the mystery of the black veil. It was of course impossible to decide whether the doctor would be able to relieve that doubt. I could only venture to suggest that the question might be guardedly put, in making the customary enquiries after the health of Miss Dunross.

In those days of slow communication, I had to wait, not for days but for weeks, before I could expect to receive Sir James's answer. His letter only reached me after an unusually long delay. For this, or for some other reason which I cannot divine, I

felt so strongly the foreboding of bad news that I abstained from breaking the seal in my mother's presence. I waited until I could retire to my own room—and then I opened the letter.

My presentiment had not deceived me. Sir James's reply contained these words only: 'The lines that I enclose tell their own sad story, without help from me. I cannot grieve for *her*. I feel heartily sorry for *you*.'

The letter thus described was addressed to Sir James by the doctor at Lerwick. I copy it without comment, in these words :—

'The late stormy weather has delayed the vessel, by means of which we communicate with the mainland. I have only received your letter to-day. With it, there has arrived a little box, containing a gold locket and chain; being the present which you ask me to convey privately to Miss

Dunross, from a friend of yours whose name you are not at liberty to mention.

'In transmitting these instructions, you have innocently placed me in a position of extreme difficulty.

'The poor lady for whom the gift is intended, is near the end of her life—a life of such complicated and terrible suffering that death comes, in her case, literally as a mercy and a deliverance. Under these melancholy circumstances, I am, I think, not to blame, if I hesitate to give her the locket in secret; not knowing with what associations this keepsake is connected, or of what serious agitation it may not possibly be the cause.

'In this state of doubt, I have ventured on opening the locket—and my hesitation is naturally increased. I am quite ignorant of the remembrances which my unhappy patient may connect with the portrait. I don't know whether it will give her pleasure or pain to

receive it, in her last moments on earth. I can only resolve to take it with me, when I see her to-morrow, and to let circumstances decide whether I shall risk giving it to her or not. Our post to the south, only leaves this place in three days' time. So I can keep my letter open, and let you know the result.

'I have seen her; and I have just returned to my own house. My distress of mind is great. But I will do my best to write intelligibly and fully of what has happened.

'Her sinking energies, when I first saw her this morning, had rallied for the moment. The nurse informed me that she slept during the early hours of the new day. Previously to this there were symptoms of fever; accompanied by some slight delirium. The words that escaped her in this condition, appear to have related mainly to an absent

person whom she spoke of by the name of "George." Her one anxiety, I am told, was to see "George" again before she died.

'Hearing this, it struck me as barely possible, that the portrait in the locket might be the portrait of the absent person. I sent her nurse out of the room; and took her hand in mine. Trusting partly to her own admirable courage and strength of mind, and partly to the confidence which I knew she placed in me as an old friend and adviser, I adverted to the words which had fallen from her in the feverish state. And then I said, "You know that any secret of yours is safe in my keeping. Tell me, do you expect to receive any little keepsake or memorial from George?"

'It was a risk to run. The black veil which she always wears was over her face. I had nothing to tell me of the effect which I was producing on her, except the changing

temperature or the partial movement of her hand, as it lay in mine, just under the silk coverlet of the bed.

'She said nothing at first. Her hand turned suddenly from cold to hot, and closed with a quick pressure on mine. Her breathing became oppressed. When she spoke, it was with difficulty. She told me nothing; she only put a question.

'"Is he here?" she asked.

'I said, "Nobody is here but myself."

'"Is there a letter?"

'I said, "No."

'She was silent for awhile. Her hand turned cold; the grasp of her fingers loosened. She spoke again: "Be quick, doctor! Whatever it is, give it to me before I die."

'I risked the experiment; I opened the locket, and put it into her hand.

'So far as I could discover, she refrained

from looking at it, at first. She said, "Turn me in the bed, with my face to the wall." I obeyed her. With her back turned towards me, she lifted her veil; and then (as I suppose) she looked at the portrait. A long low cry —not of sorrow or pain; a cry of rapture and delight—burst from her. I heard her kiss the portrait. Accustomed as I am in my profession to piteous sights and sounds, I never remember so completely losing my self-control as I lost it at that moment. I was obliged to turn away to the window.

'Hardly a minute could have passed before I was back again at the bedside. The veil was drawn once more over her face. Her voice had sunk again; I could only hear what she said, by leaning over her, and placing my ear close to her lips.

'"Put it round my neck," she whispered.

'I clasped the chain of the locket round

her neck. She tried to lift her hand to it—but her strength failed her.

'"Help me to hide it," she said.

'I guided her hand. She hid the locket in her bosom, under the white dressing-gown which she wore that day. The oppression in her breathing increased. I raised her on the pillow. The pillow was not high enough. I rested her head on my shoulder; and partially opened her veil. She spoke again; feeling a momentary relief.

'"Promise," she said, "that no stranger's hand shall touch me. Promise to bury me, as I am now."

'I gave her my promise.

'Her failing breath quickened. She was just able to articulate the next words:

'"Cover my face again."

'I drew the veil over her face. She rested awhile in silence. Suddenly, the sound of

her labouring respiration ceased. She started and raised her head from my shoulder.

'"Are you in pain?" I asked.

'"I am in Heaven!" she answered.

'Her head dropped back on my breast as she spoke. In that last outburst of joy, her last breath had passed. The moment of her supreme happiness, and the moment of her death were one. The mercy of God had found her at last.'

'I return to my letter before the post goes out.

'I have taken the necessary measures for the performance of my promise. She will be buried, with the locket hidden in her bosom, and with the black veil over her face. No nobler creature ever breathed the breath of life. Tell the stranger who sent her his portrait that her last moments were joyful moments

—through his remembrance of her, as expressed by his gift.

'I observe a passage in your letter to which I have not yet replied. You ask me if there was any more serious reason for the persistent hiding of her face under the veil, than the reason she was accustomed to give to the persons about her. It is true that she suffered under a morbid sensitiveness to the action of light. It is also true that this was not the only result, or the worst result of the malady that afflicted her. She *had* another reason for keeping her face hidden—a reason known to two persons only: to the doctor who lives in the village near her father's house, and to myself. We are both pledged never to divulge to any living creature what our eyes alone have seen. We have kept our terrible secret, even from her father, and we shall carry it with us to our graves. I have no more to say on this melancholy subject to the

person in whose interests you write. When he thinks of her now, let him think of the beauty which no bodily affliction can profane—the beauty of the freed Spirit, eternally happy in its union with the angels of God.

'I may add, before I close my letter, that the poor old father will not be left in cheerless solitude at the lake-house. He will pass the remainder of his days under my roof; with my good wife to take care of him, and my children to remind him of the brighter side of life.'

So the letter ended. I put it away, and went out. The solitude of my room forewarned me unendurably of the coming solitude in my own life. My interests in this busy world were now narrowed to one object —to the care of my mother's failing health. Of the two women whose hearts had once beaten in loving sympathy with mine, one

lay in her grave, and the other was lost to me in a foreign land. On the drive by the sea I met my mother, in her little pony-chaise, moving slowly under the mild wintry sunshine. I dismissed the man who was in attendance on her, and walked by the side of the chaise with the reins in my hand. We chatted quietly on trivial subjects. I closed my eyes to the dreary future that was before me; and tried, in the intervals of the heart-ache, to live resignedly in the passing hour.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PHYSICIAN'S OPINION.

SIX MONTHS have elapsed. Summer-time has come again.

The last parting is over. Prolonged by my care, the days of my mother's life have come to their end. She has died in my arms; her last words have been spoken to me, her last look on earth has been mine. I am now, in the saddest and plainest meaning of the words, alone in the world.

The affliction which has befallen me has left certain duties to be performed that require my presence in London. My house is let; I am staying at an hotel. My friend, Sir James (also in London on business), has

rooms near mine. We breakfast and dine together, in my sitting-room. For the moment, solitude is dreadful to me—and yet, I cannot go into society; I shrink from persons who are mere acquaintances. At Sir James's suggestion, however, one visitor at our hotel has been asked to dine with us, who claims distinction as no ordinary guest. The physician who first warned me of the critical state of my mother's health, is anxious to hear what I can tell him of her last moments. His time is too precious to be wasted in the earlier hours of the day; and he joins us at the dinner-table when his patients leave him free to visit his friends.

The dinner is nearly at an end. I have made the effort to preserve my self-control; and, in few words, I have told the simple story of my mother's last peaceful days on earth. The conversation turns next on topics of little interest to me: my mind rests after

the effort that it has made; my observation is left free to exert itself as usual.

Little by little, while the talk goes on, I observe something in the conduct of the celebrated physician which first puzzles me, and then arouses my suspicion of some motive for his presence, which has not been acknowledged, and in which I am concerned.

Over and over again, I discover that his eyes are resting on me with a furtive interest and attention which he seems anxious to conceal. Over and over again, I notice that he contrives to divert the conversation from general topics, and to lure me into talking of myself; and, stranger still (unless I am quite mistaken), Sir James understands and encourages him. Under various pretences, I am questioned about what I have suffered in the past, and what plans of life I have formed for the future. Among other

subjects of personal interest to me, the subject of supernatural appearances is introduced. I am asked if I believe in occult spiritual sympathies, and in ghostly apparitions of dead or distant persons. I am dexterously led into hinting that my views on this difficult and debateable question are in some degree influenced by experiences of my own. Hints, however, are not enough to satisfy the doctor's innocent curiosity: he tries to induce me to relate in detail what I have myself seen and felt. But, by this time, I am on my guard; I make excuses; I steadily abstain from taking my friend into my confidence. It is more and more plain to me that I am being made the subject of an experiment, in which Sir James and the physician are equally interested. Outwardly assuming to be guiltless of any suspicion of what is going on, I inwardly determine to discover the true motive for the doctor's presence that evening,

and for the part that Sir James has taken in inviting him to be my guest.

Events favour my purpose, soon after the dessert has been placed on the table.

The waiter enters the room, with a letter for me, and announces that the bearer waits to know if there is any answer. I open the envelope, and find inside a few lines from my lawyers, announcing the completion of some formal matter of business. I at once seize the opportunity that is offered to me. Instead of sending a verbal message downstairs, I make my apologies, and use the letter as a pretext for leaving the room.

Dismissing the messenger who waits below, I return to the corridor in which my rooms are situated, and softly open the door of my bedchamber. A second door communicates with the sitting-room, and has a ventilator in the upper part of it. I have only to stand under the ventilator, and every

word of the conversation between Sir James and the physician reaches my ears.

'Then you think I am right?' are the first words I hear, in Sir James's voice.

'Quite right,' the doctor answers.

'I have done my best to make him change his dull way of life,' Sir James proceeds. 'I have asked him to pay a visit to my house in Scotland; I have proposed travelling with him on the Continent; I have offered to take him with me, on my next voyage in the yacht. He has but one answer—he simply says No to everything that I can suggest. You have heard from his own lips that he has no definite plans for the future. What is to become of him? what had we better do?'

'It is not easy to say,' I hear the physician reply. 'To speak plainly, the man's nervous system is seriously deranged. I noticed something strange in him when he

first came to consult me about his mother's health. The mischief has not been caused entirely by the affliction of her death. In my belief, his mind has been—what shall I say?—unhinged, for some time past. He is a very reserved person. I suspect he has been oppressed by anxieties which he has kept secret from everyone. At his age, the unacknowledged troubles of life are generally troubles caused by women. It is in his temperament to take the romantic view of love; and some matter-of-fact woman of the present day may have bitterly disappointed him. Whatever may be the cause, the effect is plain—his nerves have broken down; and his brain is necessarily affected by whatever affects his nerves. I have known men in his condition who have ended badly. He may drift into insane delusions, if his present course of life is not altered. Did you hear what he said when we talked about ghosts?'

'Sheer nonsense!' Sir James remarks.

'Sheer delusion would be the more correct form of expression,' the doctor rejoins. 'And other delusions may flow out of it, at any moment.'

'What is to be done?' persists Sir James; 'I may really say for myself, doctor, that I feel a fatherly interest in the poor fellow. His mother was one of my oldest and dearest friends—and he has inherited many of her engaging and endearing qualities. I hope you don't think the case is bad enough to be a case for restraint?'

'Certainly not, as yet,' answers the doctor. 'So far there is no positive brain disease; and there is accordingly no sort of reason for placing him under restraint. It is essentially a doubtful and a difficult case. Have him privately looked after by a competent person, and thwart him in nothing, if you can possibly help it. The merest trifle

may excite his suspicions—and, if that happens, we lose all control over him.'

'You don't think he suspects us already —do you, doctor?'

'I hope not. I saw him once or twice look at me rather strangely—and he has certainly been a long time out of the room.'

Hearing this, I wait to hear no more. I return to the sitting-room (by way of the corridor) and resume my place at the table.

The indignation that I feel—naturally enough, I think, under the circumstances—makes a good actor of me, for once in my life. I invent the necessary excuse for my long absence, and take my part in the conversation; keeping the strictest guard on every word that escapes me, without betraying any appearance of restraint in my manner. Early in the evening, the Doctor leaves us, to go to a scientific meeting. For half an hour more Sir James remains with

me. By way as I suppose, of further testing the state of my mind, he renews the invitation to his house in Scotland. I pretend to feel flattered by his anxiety to secure me as his guest. I undertake to reconsider my first refusal, and to give him a definite answer when we meet the next morning at breakfast. Sir James is delighted; we shake hands cordially, and wish each other good night. At last I am left alone.

My resolution as to my next course of proceeding is formed without a moment's hesitation. I determine to leave the hotel privately the next morning, before Sir James is out of his bedroom.

To what destination I am to betake myself is naturally the next question that arises —and this also I easily decide. During the last days of my mother's life, we spoke together frequently of the happy past days when we were living on the banks of the

Greenwater lake. The longing thus inspired to look once more at the old scenes, to live for awhile again among the old associations, has grown on me since my mother's death. I have, happily for myself, not spoken of this feeling to Sir James, or to any other person. When I am missed at the hotel, there will be no suspicion of the direction in which I have turned my steps. To the old home in Suffolk I resolve to go the next morning. Wandering among the scenes of my boyhood, I can consider with myself how I may best bear the burden of the life that lies before me.

After what I have heard that evening, I confide in nobody. For all I know to the contrary, my own servant may be employed to-morrow as the spy who watches my actions. When the man makes his appearance to take his orders for the night, I tell him to wake

me at six o'clock the next morning, and release him from further attendance.

I next employ myself in writing two letters. They will be left on the table, to speak for themselves after my departure.

In the first letter, I briefly inform Sir James that I have discovered his true reason for inviting the doctor to dinner. While I thank him for the interest he takes in my welfare, I decline to be made the object of any further medical enquiries as to the state of my mind. In due course of time, when my plans are settled, he will hear from me again. Meanwhile, he need feel no anxiety about my safety. It is one among my other delusions to believe that I am still perfectly capable of taking care of myself. My second letter is addressed to the landlord of the hotel, and simply provides for the disposal of my luggage, and the payment of my bill.

I enter my bedroom next, and pack a

travelling-bag with the few things that I can carry with me. My money is in my dressing-case. Opening it, I discover my pretty keepsake—the green flag. Can I return to Greenwater Broad, can I look again at the bailiff's cottage, without the one memorial of little Mary that I possess? Besides, have I not promised Miss Dunross that Mary's gift shall always go with me, wherever I go; and is the promise not doubly sacred, now that she is dead? For awhile, I sit idly looking at the device on the flag—the white dove, embroidered on the green ground, with the golden olive-branch in its beak. The innocent love-story of my early life returns to my memory—and shows me in horrible contrast the life that I am leading now. I fold up the flag, and place it carefully in my travelling-bag. This done, all is done. I may rest till the morning comes.

No! I lie down in bed—and I discover that there is no rest for me, that night.

Now that I have no occupation to keep my energies employed—now that my first sense of triumph in the discomfiture of the friends who have plotted against me has had time to subside—my mind reverts to the conversation that I have overheard, and considers it from a new point of view. For the first time the terrible question confronts me:—The doctor's opinion on my case has been given very positively: how do I know that the doctor is not right?

This famous physician has risen to the head of his profession, entirely by his own abilities. He is not one of the medical men who succeed by means of an ingratiating manner and the dexterous handling of good opportunities. Even his enemies admit that he stands unrivalled in the art of separating the true conditions from the false in the

discovery of disease, and in tracing effects accurately to their distant and hidden cause. Is such a man as this likely to be mistaken about me? Is it not far more probable that I am mistaken in my judgment of myself?

When I look back over past years, am I quite sure that the strange events which I recall may not, in certain cases, be the visionary product of my own disordered brain—realities to me, and to no one else? What are the dreams of Mrs. Van Brandt, what are the ghostly apparitions of her which I believe myself to have seen? Delusions which have been the stealthy growth of years? Delusions which are leading me by slow degrees nearer and nearer to madness in the end? Is it insane suspicion which has made me so angry with the good friends who have been trying to save my reason? Is it insane terror which sets me on escaping from the hotel like a criminal escaping from prison?

These are the questions that torment me, while I am alone in the dead of night. My bed becomes a place of unendurable torture. I rise and dress myself; and wait for the daylight, looking through my open window into the street.

The summer night is short. The grey light of dawn comes to me like a deliverance; the glow of the glorious sunrise cheers my soul once more. Why should I wait in the room that is still haunted by my horrible doubts of the night? I take up my travelling-bag; I leave my letters on the sitting-room table; and I descend the stairs to the house-door. The night-porter at the hotel is slumbering in his chair. He wakes as I pass him; and (God help me!) he too looks as if he thought I was mad.

'Going to leave us already, sir?' he says, looking at the bag in my hand.

Mad or sane, I am ready with my reply.

I tell him I am going out for a day in the country—and to make it a long day I must start early.

The man still stares at me. He asks if he shall find somebody to carry my bag. I decline to let anybody be disturbed. He enquires if I have any message to leave for my friend. I inform him that I have left written messages upstairs for Sir James and the landlord. Upon this, he draws the bolts and opens the door. To the last he looks at me as if he thought I was mad.

Is he right or wrong? Who can answer for himself? How can I tell?

CHAPTER XV.

A LAST LOOK AT GREENWATER BROAD.

My spirits rose as I walked through the bright empty streets, and breathed the fresh morning air.

Making my way eastward through the great city, I stopped at the first office that I passed, and secured my place by the early coach to Ipswich. Thence, I travelled with post horses to the market-town which was nearest to Greenwater Broad. A walk of a few miles in the cool evening brought me, through well-remembered bye-roads, to our old house. By the last rays of the setting sun, I looked at the familiar row of windows in front, and saw that the shutters were all

closed. Not a living creature was visible anywhere. Not even a dog barked, as I rang the great bell at the door. The place was deserted ; the house was shut up.

After a long delay, I heard heavy footsteps in the hall. An old man opened the door.

Changed as he was, I remembered him as one of our tenants in the bygone time. To his astonishment, I greeted him by his name. On his side, he tried hard to recognise me, and evidently tried in vain. No doubt I was the most sadly changed of the two—I was obliged to introduce myself. The poor fellow's withered face brightened slowly and timidly, as if he was half incapable, half afraid, of indulging in the unaccustomed luxury of a smile. In his confusion, he bade me welcome home again, as if the house had been mine !

Taking me into the little back room which

he inhabited, the old man gave me all he had to offer—a supper of bacon and eggs, and a glass of home-brewed beer. He was evidently puzzled to understand me, when I informed him that the only object of my visit was to look once more at the familiar scenes round my old home. But he willingly placed his services at my disposal; and he engaged to do his best, if I wished it, to make me up a bed for the night.

The house had been closed, and the establishment of servants had been dismissed, for more than a year past. A passion for horse-racing, developed late in life, had ruined the rich retired tradesman who had become our tenant at the time of our family troubles. He had gone abroad with his wife, to live on the little income that had been saved from the wreck of his fortune; and he had left the house and lands in such a state of neglect that no new tenant had thus

far been found to take them. My old friend, now 'past his work,' had been put in charge of the place. As for Dermody's cottage, it was empty like the house. I was at perfect liberty to look over it if I liked. There was the key of the door, on the bunch with the others; and here was the old man, with his old hat on his head, ready to accompany me wherever I pleased to go. I declined to trouble him to accompany me, or to make me up a bed in the lonely house. The night was fine, the moon was rising. I had supped; I had rested. When I had seen what I wanted to see, I could easily walk back to the market-town, and sleep at the inn.

Taking the key in my hand, I set forth alone on the way through the grounds which led to Dermody's cottage.

Again I followed the woodland paths, along which I had once idled so happily with my little Mary. At every step, I saw some-

thing that reminded me of her. Here was the rustic bench, on which we had sat together under the shade of the old cedar tree, and vowed to be constant to each other to the end of our lives. There was the bright little water-spring, from which we drank when we were weary and thirsty in sultry summer-days, still bubbling its way downward to the lake as cheerily as ever. As I listened to the companionable murmur of the stream, I almost expected to see her again, in her simple white frock and straw hat, singing to the music of the rivulet, and freshening her nosegay of wild flowers by dipping it in the cold water. A few steps farther on, and I reached a clearing in the wood, and stood on a little promontory of rising ground, which commanded the prettiest view of the Greenwater lake. A platform of wood was built out from the bank, to be used for bathing by good swimmers, who were

not afraid of a plunge into deep water. I stood on the platform, and looked round me. The trees that fringed the shore on either side murmured their sweet sylvan music in the night air; the moonlight trembled softly on the rippling water. Away on my right hand, I could just see the old wooden shed that once sheltered my boat, in the days when Mary went sailing with me, and worked the green flag. On my left, was the wooden paling that followed the curves of the winding creek; and beyond it rose the brown arches of the Decoy for wild fowl, now falling to ruin for want of use. Guided by the radiant moonlight, I could see the very spot on which Mary and I had stood to watch the snaring of the ducks. Through the hole in the paling, before which the decoy-dog had shown himself at Dermody's signal, a water-rat now passed, like a little black shadow on the bright ground, and was lost in the waters

of the lake. Look where I might, the happy by-gone time looked back in mockery; and the voices of the past came to me with their burden of reproach: See what your life was once! Is your life worth living, now?

I picked up a stone, and threw it into the lake. I watched the circling ripples round the place at which it had sunk. I wondered whether a practised swimmer like myself had ever tried to commit suicide by drowning, and had been so resolute to die that he had resisted the temptation to let his own skill keep him from sinking. Something in the lake itself, or something in connection with the thought that it had put into my mind, revolted me. I turned my back suddenly on the lovely view, and took the path through the wood which led to the bailiff's cottage.

Opening the door with my key, I groped my way into the well-remembered parlour;

and, unbarring the window-shutters, I let in the light of the moon.

With a heavy heart, I looked round me. The old furniture, renewed perhaps in one or two places, asserted its mute claim to my recognition in every part of the room. The tender moonlight streamed into the corner in which little Mary and I used to nestle together, while Dame Dermody was at the window reading her mystic books. Overshadowed by the obscurity in the opposite corner, I discovered the high-backed armchair of carved oak in which the Sibyl of the cottage sat, on the memorable day when she warned us of our coming separation, and gave us her blessing for the last time. Looking next round the walls of the room, I recognised old friends wherever my eyes happened to rest—the gaudily-coloured prints; the framed pictures in fine needlework which we thought wonderful efforts of

art; the old circular mirror to which I used to lift Mary when she wanted to 'see her face in the glass.' Wherever the moonlight penetrated, there it showed me some familiar object that recalled my happiest days. Again, the by-gone time looked back in mockery. Again, the voices of the past came to me with their burden of reproach: See what your life was once! Is your life worth living now?

I sat down at the window, where I could just discover, here and there between the trees, the glimmer of the waters of the lake. I thought to myself:—'Thus far, my mortal journey has brought me. Why not end it here?'

Who would grieve for me, if my suicide was reported to-morrow? Of all living men, I had perhaps the smallest number of friends; the fewest duties to perform towards others; the least reason to hesitate at leaving

a world which had no place in it for my ambition, no creature in it for my love.

Besides, what necessity was there for letting it be known that my death was a death of my own seeking? It could easily be left to represent itself as a death by accident.

On that fine summer night, and after a long day of travelling, might I not naturally take a bath in the cool water before I went to bed? And practised as I was in the exercise of swimming, might it not nevertheless be my misfortune to be attacked by cramp? On the lonely shores of Greenwater Broad, the cry of a drowning man would bring no help at night: 'the fatal' accident would explain itself. There was literally but one difficulty in my way—the difficulty which had already occurred to my mind. Could I sufficiently master the animal instinct of self-pre-

servation, to deliberately let myself sink at the first plunge?

The atmosphere in the room felt close and heavy. I went out, and walked to and fro—now in the shadow, and now in the moonlight—under the trees before the cottage door.

Of the moral objections to suicide, not one had any influence over me now. I, who had once found it impossible to excuse, impossible even to understand, the despair which had driven Mrs. Van Brandt to attempt self-destruction—I now contemplated with composure the very act which had horrified me when I saw it committed by another person! Well may we hesitate to condemn the frailties of our fellow-creatures—for the one unanswerable reason that we can never feel sure how soon similar temptations may not lead us to be guilty of the same frailties ourselves. Looking back at the events of

that night, I can recall but one consideration that stayed my feet on the fatal path which led back to the lake. I still doubted whether it would be possible for such a swimmer as I was to drown himself. This was all that troubled my mind. For the rest, my Will was made; and I had few other affairs which remained unsettled. No lingering hope was left in me of a re-union in the future with Mrs. Van Brandt. She had never written to me again: I had never, since our last parting, seen her again in my dreams. She was doubtless reconciled to her life abroad. I forgave her for having forgotten me. My thoughts of her, and of others, were the forbearing thoughts of a man whose mind was withdrawn already from the world, whose views were narrowing fast to the one idea of his own death.

I grew weary of walking up and down. The loneliness of the place began to oppress

me. The sense of my own indecision irritated my nerves. After a long look at the lake, through the trees, I came to a positive conclusion at last. I determined to try if a good swimmer could drown himself.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VISION OF THE NIGHT.

Returning to the cottage parlour, I took a chair by the window, and opened my pocket-book at a blank page. I had certain directions to give to my representatives, which might spare them some trouble and uncertainty in the event of my death. Disguising my last instructions, under the commonplace heading of 'Memoranda on my return to London,' I began to write.

I had filled one page of the pocket-book, and had just turned to the next—when I became conscious of a difficulty in fixing my attention on the subject that was before it. I was at once reminded of the similar difficulty which I felt, in Shetland, when I had

tried vainly to arrange the composition of the letter to my mother which Miss Dunross was to write. By way of completing the parallel my thoughts wandered now, as they had wandered then, to my latest remembrances of Mrs. Van Brandt. In a minute or two I began to feel once more the strange physical sensations which I had first experienced in the garden at Mr. Dunross's house. The same mysterious trembling shuddered through me from head to foot. I looked about me again, with no distinct consciousness of what the objects were on which my eyes rested. My nerves trembled, on that lovely summer night, as if there had been an electric disturbance in the atmosphere, and a storm coming. I laid my pocket-book and pencil on the table, and rose to go out again under the trees. Even the trifling effort to cross the room proved to be an effort that was beyond my power. I stood rooted to the

spot, with my face turned towards the moonlight streaming in at the open door.

An interval passed; and, as I still looked out through the door, I became aware of something moving, far down among the trees that fringed the shore of the lake. The first impression produced on me was of two grey shadows winding their way slowly towards me between the trunks of the trees. By fine degrees, the shadows assumed a more and more marked outline, until they presented themselves in the likeness of two robed figures, one taller than the other. While they glided nearer and nearer, their grey obscurity of hue melted away. They brightened softly with an inner light of their own, as they approached the open space before the door. For the third time, I stood in the ghostly Presence of Mrs. Van Brandt—and with her, holding her hand, I beheld a second

apparition never before revealed to me, the apparition of her child.

Hand in hand, shining in their unearthly brightness through the bright moonlight itself, the two stood before me. The mother's face looked at me once more with the sorrowful and pleading eyes which I remembered so well. But the face of the child was innocently radiant with an angelic smile. I waited, in unutterable expectation, for the word that was to be spoken, for the movement that was to come. The movement came first. The child released its hold on the mother's hand; and, floating slowly upward, remained poised in mid air—a softly-glowing Presence, shining out of the dark background of the trees. The mother glided into the room, and stopped at the table on which I had laid my pocket-book and pencil, when I could no longer write. As before, she took the pencil, and wrote on the blank page. As before,

she beckoned to me to step nearer to her. I approached her outstretched hand; and felt once more the mysterious rapture of her touch on my bosom; and heard once more her low melodious tones, repeating the words: 'Remember me. Come to me.' Her hand dropped from my bosom. The pale light which revealed her to me quivered, sank, vanished. She had spoken. She had gone.

I drew to me the open pocket-book. And, this time, I saw in the writing of the ghostly hand these words only:

'FOLLOW THE CHILD.'

I looked out again at the lonely night landscape.

There, in mid air, shining softly out of the dark background of the trees, still hovered the starry apparition of the child.

Advancing, without conscious will of my own, I crossed the threshold of the door. The softly-glowing Vision of the child moved

away before me among the trees. I followed, like a man spell-bound. The apparition, floating slowly onward, led me out of the wood and past my old home, back to the lonely bye-roads along which I had walked from the market-town to the house. From time to time, as we two went on our way, the bright figure of the child paused, hovering low in the cloudless sky. Its radiant face looked down smiling on me: it beckoned with its little hand—and floated on again, leading me as the Star led the Eastern Sages in the olden time.

I reached the town. The airy figure of the child paused, hovering over the house at which I had left my travelling-carriage in the evening. I ordered the horses to be harnessed again for another journey. The postillion waited for his further directions. I looked up. The child's hand was pointing southward along the road that led to London.

I gave the man instructions to return to the place at which I had hired the carriage. At intervals, as we proceeded, I looked out through the window. The bright figure of the child still floated on before me, gliding low in the cloudless sky. Changing the horses stage by stage, I went on till the night ended—went on till the sun rose in the eastern heaven. And still, whether it was night or whether it was day, the figure of the child floated on before me in its changeless and mystic light. Mile after mile, it still led the way southward till we left the country behind us, and, passing through the din and turmoil of the great city, stopped under the shadow of the ancient Tower, within view of the river that runs by it.

The postillion came to the carriage door, to ask if I had further need of his services. I had called to him to stop, when I saw the figure of the child pause on its airy course.

I looked upward again. The child's hand pointed towards the river. I paid the postillion, and left the carriage. Floating on before me, the child led the way to a wharf, crowded with travellers and their luggage. A vessel lay alongside the wharf, ready to sail. The child led me on board the vessel, and paused again, hovering over me in the smoky air.

I looked up. The child looked back at me with its radiant smile; and pointed eastward down the river towards the distant sea. While my eyes were still fixed on the softly-glowing figure, I saw it fade away, upward and upward into the higher light, as the lark vanishes upward and upward in the morning sky. I was alone again with my earthly fellow-beings—left, with no clue to guide me but the remembrance of the child's hand, pointing eastward to the distant sea.

A sailor was near me, coiling a loosened mooring-rope on the deck. I asked him to what port the vessel was bound. The man looked at me in surly amazement, and answered:

'To Rotterdam.'

CHAPTER XVII.

BY LAND AND SEA.

It mattered little to me to what port the vessel was bound. Go where I might, I knew that I was on my way to Mrs. Van Brandt. She had need of me again; she had claimed me again. Where the visionary hand of the child had pointed—abroad or at home, it mattered nothing—thither I was destined to go. When I next set my foot on the land, I should be further directed on the journey which lay before me. I believed this as firmly as I believed that I had been guided thus far by the vision of the child.

For two nights I had not slept—my weariness overpowered me. I descended to

the cabin, and found an unoccupied corner in which I could lie down to rest. When I awoke, it was night already: the vessel was at sea.

I went on deck to breathe the fresh air. Before long the sensation of drowsiness returned; I slept again, for hours together. My friend the physician would no doubt have attributed this prolonged need of repose to the exhausted condition of my brain, excited by delusions which had lasted uninterruptedly for many hours together. Let the cause be what it might, during the greater part of the voyage I was awake at intervals only. The rest of the time I lay like a weary animal, lost in sleep.

When I stepped on shore at Rotterdam, my first proceeding was to ask my way to the English consulate. I had but a small sum of money left; and, for all I knew to the contrary, it might be well, before I did any-

thing else, to take the necessary measures for replenishing my purse.

I had my travelling-bag with me. On the journey to Greenwater Broad, I had left it at the inn in the market-town; and the waiter had placed it in the carriage, when I started on my return to London. The bag contained my cheque-book, and certain letters which assisted me in proving my identity to the consul. He kindly gave me the necessary introduction to the correspondents at Rotterdam of my bankers in London.

Having obtained my money, and having purchased certain necessaries of which I stood in need, I walked slowly along the street; knowing nothing of what my next proceeding was to be, and waiting confidently for the event which was to guide me. I had not walked a hundred yards before I noticed the name of 'Van Brandt,' inscribed on the

window-blinds of a house which appeared to be devoted to mercantile purposes.

The street door stood open. A second door, on one side of the passage, led into the office. I entered the room, and enquired for Mr. Van Brandt. A clerk who spoke English was sent for to communicate with me. He told me there were three partners of that name in the business, and enquired which of them I wished to see. I remembered Van Brandt's Christian name and mentioned it. No such person as 'Mr. Ernest Van Brandt' was known at the office.

'We are only the branch-house of the firm of Van Brandt here,' the clerk explained. The head-office is at Amsterdam. They may know where Mr. Ernest Van Brandt is to be found, if you enquire there.'

It mattered nothing to me where I went, so long as I was on my way to Mrs. Van

Brandt. It was too late to travel that day; I slept at an hotel. The night passed quietly and uneventfully. The next morning I set forth by the public conveyance for Amsterdam.

Repeating my enquiries at the head-office, on my arrival, I was referred to one of the partners in the firm. He spoke English perfectly; and he received me with an appearance of interest which I was at a loss to account for at first.

'Mr. Ernest Van Brandt is well known to me,' he said. 'May I ask if you are a relative or friend of the English lady who has been introduced here as his wife?'

I answered in the affirmative; adding, 'I am here to give any assistance to the lady of which she may stand in need.'

The merchant's next words explained the appearance of interest with which he had received me.

'You are most welcome,' he said. 'You relieve my partners and myself of a great anxiety. I can only explain what I mean by referring for a moment to the business affairs of my firm. We have a fishing establishment at the ancient city of Enkhuizen, on the shores of the Zuyder-Zee. Mr. Ernest Van Brandt had a share in it, at one time, which he afterwards sold. Of late years our profits from this source have been diminishing; and we think of giving up the fishery, unless our prospects in that quarter improve after a further trial. In the meantime, having a vacant situation in the counting house at Enkhuizen, we thought of Mr. Ernest Van Brandt, and offered him the opportunity of renewing his connection with us in the capacity of a clerk. He is related to one of my partners; but I am bound in truth to tell you that he is a very bad man. He has rewarded us for our kindness to him by em-

bezzling our money; and he has taken to flight—in what direction we have not yet discovered. The English lady and her child are left deserted at Enkhuizen—and until you came here to-day, we were quite at a loss to know what to do with them. I don't know whether you are already aware of it, sir—but the lady's position is made doubly distressing by doubts which we entertain of her being really Mr. Ernest Van Brandt's wife. To our certain knowledge, he was privately married to another woman, some years since —and we have no evidence whatever that the first wife is dead. If we can help you, in any way, to assist your unfortunate countrywoman, pray believe that our services are at your disposal.'

With what breathless interest I listened to these words, it is needless to say. Van Brandt had deserted her! Surely (as my poor mother had said) 'she must turn to me

now'? The hopes that had abandoned me filled my heart once more; the future which I had so long feared to contemplate, showed itself again, bright with the promise of coming happiness, to my view. I thanked the good merchant with a fervour that surprised him. 'Only help me to find my way to Enkhuizen,' I said; 'and I will answer for the rest.'

'The journey will put you to some expense,' the merchant replied. 'Pardon me if I ask the question bluntly. Have you money?'

'Plenty of money!'

'Very good! The rest will be easy enough. I will place you under the care of a countryman of yours, who has been employed in our office for many years. The easiest way for you, as a stranger, will be to go by sea; and the Englishman will show you where to hire a boat.'

In a few minutes more the clerk and I were on our way to the harbour.

Difficulties which I had not anticipated occurred in finding the boat and in engaging a crew. This done, it was next necessary to purchase provisions for the voyage. Thanks to the experience of my companion, and to the hearty goodwill with which he exerted it, my preparations were completed before nightfall. I was able to set sail for my destination on the next day.

The boat had the double advantage, in navigating the Zuyder-Zee, of being large, and of drawing very little water. The captain's cabin was at the stern; and the two or three men who formed his crew were berthed forward, in the bows. The whole middle of the boat, partitioned off on the one side and on the other from the captain and the crew, was assigned to me for my cabin. Under these circumstances, I had no reason

to complain of want of space; the vessel measuring between fifty and sixty tons. I had a comfortable bed, a table, and chairs. The kitchen was well away from me, in the forward part of the boat. At my own request, I set forth on the voyage without servant or interpreter. I preferred being alone. The Dutch captain had been employed, at a former period of his life, in the mercantile navy of France; and we could communicate, whenever it was necessary or desirable, in the French language.

We left the spires of Amsterdam behind us, and sailed over the smooth waters of the river Y on our way to the Zuyder-Zee.

The history of this remarkable Sea is a romance in itself. In the days when Rome was mistress of the world it had no existence. Where the waves now roll, vast tracts of forest surrounded a great inland lake, with but one river to serve it as an outlet to the

sea. Swelled by a succession of tempests, the lake overflowed its boundaries; its furious waters, destroying every obstacle in their course, rested only when they reached the farthest limits of the land. The great Northern Ocean burst its way in, through the gaps of ruin; and, from that time, the Zuyder-Zee existed as we know it now. The years advanced; the generations of man succeeded each other; and on the shores of the new ocean there rose great and populous cities, rich in commerce, renowned in history. For centuries their prosperity lasted, before the next in this mighty series of changes ripened and revealed itself. Isolated from the rest of the world; vain of themselves and their good fortune; careless of the march of progress in the nations round them, the inhabitants of the Zuyder Zee cities sank into the fatal torpor of a secluded people. The few members of the population who

still preserved the relics of their old energy emigrated; while the mass left behind witnessed resignedly the diminution of their commerce and the decay of their institutions. As the years advanced to the nineteenth century, the population was reckoned by hundreds, where it had once been numbered by thousands. Trade disappeared; whole streets were left desolate. Harbours once filled with shipping were destroyed by the unresisted accumulation of sand. In our times, the decay of these once flourishing cities is so completely beyond remedy, that the next great change in contemplation is the draining of the now dangerous and useless tract of water, and the profitable cultivation of the reclaimed land by generations that are still to come. Such, briefly told, is the strange story of the Zuyder-Zee.

As we advanced on our voyage, and left the river, I noticed the tawny hue of the

sea, caused by sandbanks which colour the shallow water, and which make the navigation dangerous to inexperienced seamen. We found our moorings for the night at the fishing-island of Marken—a low, lost, desolate-looking place, as I saw it under the last gleams of the twilight. Here and there, the gabled cottages, perched on hillocks, rose black against the dim grey sky. Here and there, a human figure appeared at the water-side, standing fixed in contemplation of the strange boat. And that was all I saw of the island of Marken.

Lying awake in the still night, alone on a strange sea, there were moments when I found myself beginning to doubt the reality of my own position.

Was it all a dream? My thoughts of suicide; my vision of the mother and daughter; my journey back to the metropolis, led by the apparition of the child; my voyage

to Holland; my night-anchorage in the unknown sea—were these, so to speak, all pieces of the same morbid mental puzzle, all delusions from which I might wake at any moment, and find myself restored to my senses again in the hotel at London? Bewildered by doubts which led me farther and farther from any definite conclusion, I left my bed, and went on deck to change the scene. It was a still and cloudy night. In the black void round me, the island was a blacker shadow yet, and nothing more. The one sound that reached my ears was the heavy breathing of the captain and his crew, sleeping on either side of me. I waited, looking round and round the circle of darkness in which I stood. No new vision showed itself. When I returned again to the cabin, and slumbered at last, no dreams came to me. All that was mysterious, all that was marvellous, in the later events of my

life, seemed to have been left behind me in England. Once in Holland, my course had been influenced by circumstances which were perfectly natural, by commonplace discoveries which might have revealed themselves to any man in my position. What did this mean? Had my gifts as a seer of visions departed from me in the new land and among the strange people? Or had my Destiny led me to the place at which the troubles of my mortal pilgrimage were to find their end? Who could say?

Early the next morning, we set sail once more.

Our course was nearly northward. On one side of me was the tawny sea, changing under certain conditions of the weather to a dull pearl-grey. On the other side, was the flat winding coast, composed alternately of yellow sand and bright green meadowlands: diversified at intervals by towns and villages,

whose red-tiled roofs and quaint church steeples rose gaily against the clear blue sky. The captain suggested to me to visit the famous towns of Edam and Hoorn, but I declined to go on shore. My one desire was to reach the ancient city in which Mrs. Van Brandt had been left deserted. As we altered our course to make for the promontory on which Enkhuizen is situated, the wind fell—then shifted to another quarter, and blew with a force which greatly increased the difficulties of navigation. I still insisted, as long as it was possible to do so, on holding on our course. After sunset, the strength of the wind abated. The night came without a cloud; and the starry firmament gave us its pale and melancholy light. In an hour more the capricious wind shifted back again in our favour. Towards ten o'clock we sailed into the desolate harbour of Enkhuizen.

The captain and crew, fatigued by their exertions, ate their frugal suppers, and went to rest. In a few minutes, I was the only person left awake in the boat.

I ascended to the deck, and looked about me.

Our boat was moored to a deserted quay. Excepting a few small vessels visible near us, the harbour of this once prosperous place was a vast solitude of water, varied here and there by dreary banks of sand. Looking inland, I saw the lonely buildings of the Dead City—black, grim and dreadful, under the mysterious starlight. Not a human creature, not even a stray animal, was to be seen anywhere. The place might have been desolated by a pestilence, so empty and so lifeless did it now appear. Little more than a hundred years ago, the record of its population reached sixty thousand. The inhabitants had dwindled to a tenth of that number when I looked at Enkhuizen now!

I considered with myself what my next course of proceeding was to be.

The chances were certainly against my discovering Mrs. Van Brandt if I ventured alone and unguided into the city at night. On the other hand, now that I had reached the place in which she and her child were living, friendless and deserted, could I patiently wait through the weary interval that must elapse before the morning came and the town was astir? I knew my own self-tormenting disposition too well to accept this latter alternative. Whatever came of it, I determined to walk through Enkhuizen, on the bare chance of passing the office of the fishery, and of so discovering Mrs. Van Brandt's address.

First taking the precaution of locking my cabin door, I stepped from the bulwark of the vessel to the lonely quay, and set forth upon my night wanderings through the Dead City.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER THE WINDOW.

I SET the position of the harbour by my pocket-compass, and followed the course of the first street that lay before me.

On either side, as I advanced, the desolate old houses frowned on me. There were no lights in the windows, no lamps in the street. For a quarter of an hour at least I penetrated deeper and deeper on my way into the city, without encountering a living creature—with only the starlight to guide me. Turning by chance into a street broader than the rest, I at last saw a moving figure, just visible ahead, under the shadows of the houses. I quickened my pace, and found myself fol-

lowing a man in the dress of peasant. Hearing my footsteps behind him, he turned and looked at me. Discovering that I was a stranger, he lifted a thick cudgel that he carried with him, shook it threateningly, and called to me in his own language (as I gathered by his actions) to stand back. A stranger in Enkhuizen at that time of night was evidently reckoned as a robber in the estimation of this citizen! I had learnt on the voyage, from the captain of the boat, how to ask my way in Dutch, if I happened to be by myself in a strange town; and I now repeated my lesson, asking my way to the fishing office of Van Brandt. Either my foreign accent made me unintelligible, or the man's suspicions disinclined him to trust me. Again he shook his cudgel; and again he signed to me to stand back. It was useless to persist. I crossed to the opposite side of

the way, and soon afterwards lost sight of him under the portico of a house.

Still following the windings of the deserted streets, I reached what I at first supposed to be the end of the town.

Before me, for half a mile or more as well as I could guess, rose a tract of meadow-land, with sheep dotted over it at intervals, reposing for the night. I advanced over the grass, and observed here and there where the ground rose a little, some mouldering fragments of brickwork. Looking onward, as I reached the middle of the meadow, I perceived on its farther side, towering gaunt and black in the night, a lofty arch or gate-way, without walls at its sides, without a neighbouring building of any sort visible, far or near. This (as I afterwards learnt) was one of the ancient gates of the city. The walls, crumbling to ruin, had been destroyed as useless obstacles that cumbered

the ground. On the waste meadowland round me had once stood the shops of the richest merchants, the palaces of the proudest nobles, of North Holland. I was actually standing on what had formerly been the wealthiest quarter of Enkhuizen. And what was left of it now? A few mounds of broken bricks, a pasture-land of sweet-smelling grass, and a little flock of sheep sleeping.

The mere desolation of the view (apart altogether from its history) struck me with a feeling of horror. My mind seemed to lose its balance, in the dreadful stillness that was round me. I felt unutterable forebodings of calamity to come. For the first time, I repented having left England. My thoughts turned regretfully to the woody shores of Greenwater Broad. If I had only held to my resolution, I might have been at rest now in the deep waters of the lake. For

what had I lived, and planned, and travelled, since I left Dermody's cottage? Perhaps, only to find that I had lost the woman whom I loved—now that I was in the same town with her!

Regaining the outer rows of houses still left standing, I looked about me, intending to return by the street along which I had advanced. Just as I thought I had discovered it, I noticed another living creature in the solitary city. A man was standing at the door of one of the outermost houses, on my right hand, looking at me.

At the risk of meeting with another rough reception, I determined to make a last effort to discover Mrs. Van Brandt, before I returned to the boat.

Seeing that I was approaching him, the stranger met me midway. His dress and manner showed plainly that I had not encountered, this time, a person in the lower

ranks of life. He answered my question civilly in his own language. Seeing that I was at a loss to understand what he said, he invited me by signs to follow him.

After walking for a few minutes in a direction which was quite new to me, we stopped in a gloomy little square, with a plot of neglected garden ground in the middle of it. Pointing to a lower window in one of the houses, in which a light dimly appeared, my guide said in Dutch, 'Office of Van Brandt, sir'—bowed—and left me.

I advanced to the window. It was open; and it was just high enough to be above my head. The light in the room found its way outward through the interstices of closed wooden shutters. Still haunted by misgivings of trouble to come, I hesitated to announce my arrival precipitately by ringing the house bell. How did I know what new calamity might not confront me when the door was

opened? I waited under the window—and listened.

Hardly a minute had passed before I heard a woman's voice in the room. There was no mistaking the charm of those tones. It was the voice of Mrs Van Brandt.

'Come, darling!' she said. 'It is very late—you ought to have been in your bed two hours ago.'

The child's voice answered, 'I am not sleepy, mamma.'

'But, my dear, remember you have been ill. You may be ill again, if you keep out of bed so late as this. Only lie down, and you will soon fall asleep when I put the candle out.'

'You must *not* put the candle out,' the child returned with strong emphasis. 'My new papa is coming. How is he to find his way to us, if you put out the light?'

The mother replied sharply, as if the child's strange words had irritated her.

'You are talking nonsense,' she said; 'and you must go to bed. Mr. Germaine knows nothing about us. Mr. Germaine is in England.'

I could restrain myself no longer. I called out under the window,

'Mr. Germaine is here!'

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE AND PRIDE.

A CRY of terror from the room told me that I had been heard. For a moment more, nothing happened. Then the child's voice reached me, wild and shrill: 'Open the shutters, mamma! I said he was coming; I want to see him!'

There was still an interval of hesitation before the mother opened the shutters. She did it at last. I saw her darkly at the window, with the light behind her, and the child's head just visible above the lower part of the window-frame. The quaint little face moved rapidly up and down, as if my self-appointed daughter was dancing for joy!

'Can I trust my own senses?' said Mrs. Van Brandt. 'Is it really Mr. Germaine?'

'How do you do, new papa?' cried the child. 'Push open the big door—and come in. I want to kiss you.'

There was a world of difference between the coldly-doubtful tone of the mother and the joyous greeting of the child. Had I forced myself too suddenly on Mrs. Van Brandt? Like all sensitively-organised persons, she possessed the inbred sense of self-respect which is pride under another name. Was her pride wounded by the bare idea of my seeing her, deserted as well as deceived—abandoned contemptuously, a helpless burden on strangers, by the man for whom she had sacrificed and suffered so much? And that man a thief, flying from the employers whom he had cheated! I pushed open the heavy oaken door, fearing that this might be the true explanation of the change which I had

already remarked in her. My apprehensions were confirmed, when she unlocked the inner-door leading from the court-yard to the sitting-room, and let me in.

As I took her by both hands and kissed her, she quickly turned her head, so that my lips touched her cheek only. She flushed deeply; her eyes were on the ground, as she expressed in a few formal words her surprise at seeing me. When the child flew to my arms, she cried out irritably, 'Don't trouble Mr. Germaine!' I took a chair with the little one on my knee. Mrs. Van Brandt seated herself at a distance from me. 'It is needless, I suppose, to ask if you know what has happened?' she said; turning pale again as suddenly as she had turned red, and keeping her eyes fixed obstinately on the floor.

Before I could answer, the child burst out gaily with the news of her father's disappearance:

'My other papa has run away! My other papa has stolen money! It's time I had a new one—isn't it?' She put her arms round my neck. 'And now I've got him!' she cried, at the shrillest pitch of her voice.

The mother looked at us. For a while, the proud sensitive woman struggled successfully with herself. But the pang that wrung her was not to be endured in silence. With a low cry of pain, she hid her face in her hands. Overwhelmed by the sense of her own degradation, she was even ashamed to let the man who loved her see that she was in tears.

I took the child off my knee. There was a second door in the sitting-room, which happened to be left open. It showed me a bedchamber within, and a candle burning on the toilette-table.

'Go in there, and play,' I said. 'I want to talk to your mamma.'

The child pouted: my proposal did not appear to tempt her. 'Give me something to play with,' she said. 'I'm tired of my toys. Let me see what you have got in your pockets.'

Her busy little hands began to search in my coat-pockets. I let her take what she pleased, and so bribed her to run away into the inner room. As soon as she was out of sight, I approached the poor mother and seated myself by her side.

'Think of it as I do,' I said. 'Now that he has forsaken you, he has left you free to be mine.'

She lifted her head instantly.

'Now that he has forsaken me,' she answered, 'I am more unworthy of you than ever!'

'Why?' I asked.

'Why!' she repeated passionately. Has a woman not reached the lowest depths of

degradation, when she has lived to be deserted by a thief?'

It was hopeless to attempt to reason with her, in her present frame of mind. I tried to attract her attention to a less painful subject, by referring to the strange succession of events which had brought me to her for the third time. She stopped me wearily at the outset.

'It seems useless to say once more, what we have said on other occasions,' she answered. 'I understand what has brought you here. I have appeared to you again in a dream or a vision, just as I appeared to you twice before.'

'No,' I said. 'Not as you appeared to me twice before. This time, I saw you with the child by your side.'

That reply roused her. She started, and looked nervously towards the bedchamber door.

'Don't speak loud!' she said. 'Don't let the child hear us! My dream of you this time has left a painful impression on my mind. The child is mixed up in it—and I don't like that. Then, the place in which I dreamt that I saw you, is associated——' She paused, leaving the sentence unfinished. 'I am nervous and wretched to-night,' she resumed; 'and I don't want to speak of it. And yet, I should like to know whether you really were in *that* cottage, of all the places in the world?'

I was at a loss to understand the embarrassment which she appeared to feel in putting her question. There was nothing very wonderful, to my mind, in the discovery that she had been in Suffolk, and that she was acquainted with Greenwater Broad. The lake was known all over the county, as a favourite resort of pic-nic parties; and Dermody's pretty cottage used to be one of

the popular attractions of the scene. What really surprised me was to see, as I now plainly saw, that she had some painful associations with my old home. I decided on answering her question in such terms as might encourage her to take me into her confidence. In a moment more, I should have told her that my boyhood had been passed at Greenwater Broad—in a moment more we should have recognised each other —when a trivial interruption suspended the words on my lips. The child ran out of the bedchamber with a quaintly-shaped key in her hand.

'What is this?' she asked, as she approached me.

'My key,' I answered, recognising one of the things which she had taken out of my pockets.

'What does it open?'

'The cabin door, on board my boat.'

'Take me to your boat.'

Her mother interposed. A new discussion followed, on the question of going, or not going, to bed. By the time the little creature had left us again, with permission to play for a few minutes longer, the conversation between Mrs. Van Brandt and myself had taken a new direction. Speaking now of the child's health, we were led naturally to the subject of the child's connection with her mother's dream.

'She had been ill with fever,' Mrs. Van Brandt began; 'and she was just getting better again on the day when I was left deserted in this miserable place. Towards evening, she had another attack that frightened me dreadfully. She became perfectly insensible—her little limbs were stiff and cold. There is one doctor here who has not yet abandoned the town. Of course, I sent for him. He thought her insensibility

was caused by a sort of cataleptic seizure. At the same time, he comforted me by saying that she was in no immediate danger of death; and he left me certain remedies to be given, if certain symptoms appeared. I took her to bed; and held her to me, with the idea of keeping her warm. Without believing in mesmerism, do you think it likely that we might have had some influence over each other which may explain what followed?'

'Quite likely. At the same time, the mesmeric theory (if you could believe in it) would carry the explanation farther still. Mesmerism would assert, not only that you and the child influenced each other, but that —in spite of the distance—you both influenced *me*. And, in that way, mesmerism would account for my vision as the necessary result of a highly-developed sympathy between us. Tell me, did you fall asleep with the child in your arms?'

'Yes. I was completely worn out; and I fell asleep in spite of my resolution to watch through the night. In my forlorn situation, forsaken in a strange place, with a sick child, I dreamed of you again, and I appealed to you again as my one protector and friend. The only new thing in the dream was that I thought I had the child with me when I approached you, and that she put the words into my mind, when I wrote in your book. You saw the words, I suppose? and they vanished, no doubt, as before? When I woke, I found my little darling still lying like a dead creature in my arms. All through the night, there was no change in her. She only recovered her senses at noon the next day. Why do you start? What have I said that surprises you?'

There was good reason for my feeling startled, and showing it. On the day and at the hour when the child had come to herself,

I had stood on the deck of the vessel, and had seen the apparition of her disappear from my view!

'Did she say anything,' I asked, 'when she recovered her senses?'

'Yes. She, too, had been dreaming—dreaming that she was in company with You. She said, "He is coming to see us, mamma; and I have been showing him the way." I asked her where she had seen you. She spoke confusedly of more places than one. She talked of trees, and a cottage, and a lake. Then of fields and hedges and lonely lanes. Then of a carriage and horses, and a long white road. Then of crowded streets and houses, and a river, and a ship. As to these last objects, there is nothing very wonderful in what she said. The houses, the river, and the ship which she saw in her dream, she saw in the reality when we took her from London to Rotterdam, on our way here. But

as to the other places, especially the cottage and the lake (as she described them), I can only suppose that her dream was the reflection of mine. *I* had been dreaming of the cottage and the lake, as I once knew them in years long gone by; and—Heaven only knows why—I had associated You with the scene. Never mind going into that now! I don't know what infatuation it is that makes me trifle in this way with old recollections which affect me painfully in my present position. We were talking of the child's health—let us go back to that.'

It was not easy to return to the topic of her child's health. She had revived my curiosity on the subject of her associations with Greenwater Broad. The little one was still quietly at play in the bedchamber. My second opportunity was before me. I took it.

'I won't distress you,' I said. 'I will

only ask leave, before we change the subject, to put one question to you about the cottage and the lake.'

As the fatality that pursued us willed it, it was *her* turn now to be innocently an obstacle in the way of our discovering each other.

'I can tell you nothing more to-night,' she interposed, rising impatiently. 'It is time I put the child to bed—and, besides, I can't talk of things that distress me. You must wait for the time—if it ever comes!—when I am calmer and happier than I am now.'

She turned to enter the bedchamber. Acting headlong on the impulse of the moment, I took her by the hand, and stopped her.

'You have only to choose,' I said, 'and the calmer and happier time is yours, from this moment.'

'Mine?' she repeated. 'What do you mean?'

'Say the word,' I replied, 'and you and your child have a home and a future before you.'

She looked at me half bewildered, half angry.

'Do you offer me your protection?' she asked.

'I offer you a husband's protection,' I answered. 'I ask you to be my wife.'

She advanced a step nearer to me, with her eyes riveted on my face.

'You are evidently ignorant of what has really happened,' she said. 'And yet, God knows, the child spoke plainly enough!'

'The child only told me,' I rejoined, 'what I had heard already, on my way here.'

'All of it?'

'All of it.'

'And you are still willing to marry me?'

'I can imagine no greater happiness than to make you my wife.'

'Knowing what you know now?'

'Knowing what I know now, I ask you confidently to give me your hand. Whatever claim that man may once have had, as the father of your child, he has now forfeited it by his infamous desertion of you. In every sense of the word, my darling, you are a free woman. We have had sorrow enough in our lives. Happiness is at last within our reach. Come to me—and say Yes.'

I tried to take her in my arms. She drew back as if I had frightened her.

'Never!' she said firmly.

I whispered my next words, so that the child in the inner room might not hear us.

'You once said you loved me!'

'I do love you!'

'As dearly as ever?'

'*More* dearly than ever!

'Kiss me!'

She yielded mechanically. She kissed me—with cold lips, with big tears in her eyes.

'You don't love me!' I burst out angrily. 'You kiss me as if it was a duty. Your lips are cold—your heart is cold. You don't love me!'

She looked at me sadly, with a patient smile.

'One of us must remember the difference between your position and mine,' she said. 'You are a man of stainless honour, who holds an undisputed rank in the world. And what am I? I am the deserted mistress of a thief. One of us must remember that. You have generously forgotten it. I must bear it in mind. I dare say I am cold. Suffering

has that effect on me—and, I own it, I am suffering now.'

I was too passionately in love with her to feel the sympathy on which she evidently counted, in saying those words. A man can respect a woman's scruples when they appeal to him mutely in her looks or in her tears. But the formal expression of them in words only irritates or annoys him.

'Whose fault is it if you suffer?' I retorted coldly. 'I ask you to make my life a happy one, and your life a happy one. You are a cruelly-wronged woman—but you are not a degraded woman. You are worthy to be my wife; and I am ready to declare it publicly. Come back with me to England. My boat is waiting for you.'

She dropped into a chair; her hands fell helplessly into her lap.

'How cruel!' she murmured; 'how cruel to tempt me!' She waited a little, and re-

covered her fatal firmness. 'No!' she said, 'if I die in doing it, I can still refuse to disgrace you. Leave me, Mr. Germaine. You can show me that one kindness more. For God's sake, leave me!'

I made a last appeal to her tenderness.

'Do you know what my life is, if I live without you?' I asked. 'My mother is dead. There is not a living creature left in the world whom I love, but you. And you ask me to leave you! Where am I to go? what am I to do? You talk of cruelty! Is there no cruelty in sacrificing the happiness of my life to a miserable scruple of delicacy, to an unreasoning fear of the opinion of the world? I love you—and you love me. There is no other consideration worth a straw. Come back with me to England! come back and be my wife!'

She dropped on her knees, and, taking my hand, put it silently to her lips. I tried

to raise her. It was useless: she steadily resisted me.

'Does this mean No?' I asked.

'It means,' she said, in faint broken tones, 'that I prize your honour beyond my happiness. If I marry you, your career is destroyed by your wife—and the day will come when you will tell me so. I can suffer—I can die—but I can *not* face such a prospect as that. Forgive me, and forget me. I can say no more!'

She let go of my hand, and sank on the floor. The utter despair of that action told me, far more eloquently than the words which she had just spoken, that her resolution was immovable. She had deliberately separated herself from me; her own act had parted us for ever.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TWO DESTINIES.

I MADE no movement to leave the room; I let no sign of sorrow escape me. My heart was hardened against the woman who had so obstinately rejected me. I stood looking down at her with a merciless anger, the bare remembrance of which fills me at this day with a horror of myself. There is but one excuse for me. The shock of that last overthrow of the only hope that held me to life was more than my reason could endure. On that dreadful night (whatever I may have been at other times), I myself believe it—I was a maddened man.

I was the first to break the silence.

'Get up,' I said coldly.

She lifted her face from the floor, and looked at me doubting whether she had heard aright.

'Put on your hat and cloak,' I resumed. 'I must ask you to go back with me as far as the boat.'

She rose slowly. Her eyes rested on my face with a dull bewildered look.

'Why am I to go with you to the boat?' she asked.

The child heard her. The child ran up to us with her little hat in one hand, and the key of the cabin in the other.

'I'm ready!' she said. 'I will open the cabin door.'

Her mother signed to her to go back to the bedchamber. She went back as far as the door which led into the courtyard, and waited there listening. I turned coldly to

Mrs. Van Brandt, and answered the question which she had addressed to me.

'You are left,' I said, 'without the means of getting away from this place. In two hours more, the tide will be in my favour, and I shall sail at once on the return voyage. We part, this time, never to meet again. Before I go, I am resolved to leave you properly provided for. My money is in my travelling-bag in the cabin. For that reason, I am obliged to ask you to go with me as far as the boat.'

'I thank you gratefully for your kindness,' she said. 'I don't stand in such serious need of help as you suppose.'

'It is useless to attempt to deceive me,' I proceeded. 'I have spoken with the head-partner of the house of Van Brandt, at Amsterdam; and I know exactly what your position is. Your pride must bend low enough to take from my hands the means of

subsistence for yourself and your child. If I had died in England——'

I stopped. The unexpressed idea in my mind was to tell her that she would inherit a legacy under my Will, and that she might quite as becomingly take money from me in my lifetime as take it from my executors after my death. In forming this thought into words, the associations which it called naturally into being, revived in me the memory of my contemplated suicide in the lake. Mingling with the remembrances thus aroused, there rose in me, unbidden, a Temptation so unutterably vile, and yet so irresistible in the state of my mind at the moment, that it shook me to the soul. 'You have nothing to live for, now that she has refused to be yours,' the fiend in me whispered. 'Take your leap into the next world—and make the woman whom you love take it with you!' While I was still

looking at her—while the last words I had spoken to her faltered on my lips—the horrible facilities for the perpetration of the double crime revealed themselves enticingly to my view. My boat was moored in the one part of the decaying harbour in which deep water still lay at the foot of the quay. I had only to induce her to follow me when I stepped on deck, to seize her in my arms, and to jump overboard with her before she could utter a cry for help. My drowsy sailors, as I knew by experience, were hard to wake and slow to move even when they were roused at last. We should both be drowned before the youngest and the quickest of them could get up from his bed and make his way to the deck. Yes! We should both be struck together out of the ranks of the living, at one and the same moment! And why not? She, who had again and again refused to be my wife—did she deserve that I should

leave her free to go back perhaps for the second time to Van Brandt? On the evening when I had saved her from the waters of the Scotch river, I had made myself master of her fate. She had tried to destroy herself by drowning—she should drown now, in the arms of the man who had once thrown himself between her and death!

Self-abandoned to such atrocious reasoning as this, I stood face to face with her, and returned deliberately to my unfinished sentence.

'If I had died in England, you would have been provided for by my Will. What you would have taken from me then, you may take from me now. Come to the boat.'

A change passed over her face as I spoke; a vague doubt of me began to show itself in her eyes. She drew back a little, without making any reply.

'Come to the boat!' I reiterated.

'It is too late.' With that answer she looked across the room at the child, still waiting by the door. 'Come, Elfie!' she said, calling to the little creature by one of her favourite nick-names. 'Come to bed.'

I too looked at Elfie. Might she not (I asked myself) be made the innocent means of forcing her mother to leave the house? Trusting to the child's fearless character and her eagerness to see the boat, I suddenly opened the door. As I had anticipated, she instantly ran out. The second door, leading into the square, I had not closed when I entered the court-yard. In another moment, Elfie was out in the square, triumphing in her freedom. The shrill little voice broke the deathlike stillness of the place and hour, calling to me again and again to take her to the boat.

I turned to Mrs. Van Brandt. The stratagem had succeeded. Elfie's mother

could hardly refuse to follow when Elfie led the way.

'Will you go with us?' I asked. 'Or must I send the money back by the child?'

Her eyes rested on me for a moment with a deepening expression of distrust—then looked away again. She began to turn pale. 'You are not like yourself to-night,' she said. Without a word more, she took her hat and cloak, and went out before me into the square. I followed her, closing the doors behind me. She made an attempt to induce the child to approach her. 'Come, darling,' she said enticingly, 'come, and take my hand.'

But Elfie was not to be caught: she took to her heels, and answered from a safe distance. 'No,' said the child, 'you will take me back and put me to bed.' She retreated a little farther, and held up the key. 'I shall go first,' she cried, 'and open the door!'

She trotted off in the direction of the harbour, and waited for us at the corner of the street. Her mother suddenly turned, and looked close at me under the light of the stars.

'Are the sailors on board the boat?' she asked.

The question startled me. Had she any suspicion of my purpose? Had my face warned her of lurking danger, if she went to the boat? It was impossible! The more likely motive for her enquiry was to find a new excuse for not accompanying me to the harbour. If I told her that the men were on board, she might say, 'Why not employ one of your sailors to bring the money to me at the house?' I anticipated the suggestion in making my reply.

'They may be honest men,' I said, watching her carefully. 'But I don't know them well enough to trust them with money.'

To my surprise, she watched me just as carefully on her side, and deliberately repeated her question.

'Are the sailors on board the boat?'

I thought it wise to yield. I answered 'Yes,' and paused to see what would follow. My reply seemed to rouse her resolution. After a moment's consideration, she turned towards the place at which the child was waiting for us. 'Let us go, as you insist on it,' she said quietly. I made no further remark. Side by side, in silence, we followed Elfie on our way to the boat.

Not a human creature passed us in the streets; not a light glimmered on us from the grim black houses. Twice, the child stopped, and (still keeping slily out of her mother's reach) ran back to me, wondering at my silence. 'Why don't you speak?' she asked. 'Have you and mamma quarrelled?'

I was incapable of answering her. I

could think of nothing but my contemplated crime. Neither fear nor remorse troubled me. Every better instinct, every nobler feeling that I had once possessed, seemed to be dead and gone. Not even a thought of the child's future troubled my mind. I had no power of looking on farther than the fatal leap from the boat: beyond that, there was an utter blank. For the time being—I can only repeat it—my moral sense was obscured, my mental faculties were thrown completely off their balance. The animal part of me lived and moved as usual; the viler animal instincts in me plotted and planned—and that was all. Nobody, looking at me, would have seen anything but a dull quietude in my face, an immovable composure in my manner. And yet, no madman was ever fitter for restraint, or less responsible morally for his own actions, than I was at that moment.

The night air blew more freshly on our

faces. Still led by the child, we had passed through the last street—we were out on the empty open space which was the landward boundary of the habour. In a minute more, we stood on the quay, within a step of the gunwale of the boat.

I noticed a change in the appearance of the harbour since I had seen it last. Some fishing boats had come in during my absence. They were moored, some immediately astern and some immediately ahead of my own vessel. I looked anxiously to see if any of the fishermen were on board and stirring. Not a living being appeared anywhere. The men were on shore with their wives and their families.

Elfie held out her arms, to be lifted on board my boat. Mrs. Van Brandt stepped between us as I stooped to take her up.

'We will wait here,' she said, 'while you go into the cabin and get the money.'

Those words placed it beyond all doubt that she had her suspicions of me—suspicions, probably, which led her to fear, not for her life, but for her freedom. She might dread being kept a prisoner in the boat, and being carried away by me against her will. More than this, she could not thus far possibly apprehend. The child saved me the trouble of making any remonstrance. She was determined to go with me. 'I must see the cabin!' she cried, holding up the key. 'I must open the door myself!'

She twisted herself out of her mother's hands, and ran round to the other side of me. I lifted her over the gunwale of the boat in an instant. Before I could turn round, her mother had followed her, and was standing on the deck.

The cabin-door, in the position which she now occupied, was on her left hand. The child was close behind her. I was on her

right. Before us was the open deck, and the low gunwale of the boat overlooking the deep water. In a moment we might step across; in a moment we might take the fatal plunge. The bare thought of it brought the mad wickedness in me to its climax. I became suddenly incapable of restraining myself. I threw my arm round her waist with a loud laugh. 'Come!' I said, trying to drag her across the deck. 'Come, and look at the water!'

She released herself, by a sudden effort of strength that astonished me. With a faint cry of horror, she turned to take the child by the hand and get back to the quay. I placed myself between her and the side of the boat, and cut off her retreat in that way. Still laughing, I asked what she was frightened about. She drew back, and snatched the key of the cabin-door out of the child's hand. The cabin behind her was the one place of

refuge now left to which she could escape from the deck of the boat. In the terror of the moment, she never hesitated. She unlocked the door, and hurried down the two or three steps which led into the cabin, taking the child with her. I followed them; conscious that I had betrayed myself—yet still obstinately, stupidly, madly bent on carrying out my purpose. 'I have only to behave quietly,' I thought to myself; 'and I shall persuade her to go on deck again.'

My lamp was burning as I had left it; my travelling bag was on the table. Still holding the child, she stood pale as death, waiting for me. Elfie's wondering eyes rested enquiringly on my face as I approached. She looked half inclined to cry: the suddenness of the mother's action had frightened the child. I did my best to compose her, before I spoke to her mother. I pointed out the different objects which were likely to interest

her in the cabin. 'Go and look at them,' I said. 'Go and amuse yourself, Elfie.'

The child still hesitated. 'Are you angry with me?' she asked.

'No! no!'

'Are you angry with mamma?'

'Certainly not!' I turned to Mrs. Van Brandt. 'Tell Elfie if I am angry with you,' I said.

She was perfectly aware, in her critical position, of the necessity of humouring me. Between us, we succeeded in composing the child. She turned away to examine in high delight the new and strange objects which surrounded her. Meanwhile, her mother and I stood together, looking at each other by the light of the lamp, with an assumed composure which hid our true faces like a mask. In that horrible situation, the grotesque and the terrible, always together in this strange life of ours, came together now. On either side of

us the one sound that broke the sinister and threatening silence, was the lumpish snoring of the sleeping captain and crew.

She was the first to speak.

'If you wish to give me the money,' she said, trying to propitiate me in that way, 'I am ready to take it now.'

I unlocked my travelling bag. As I looked into it for the leather case which held my money, my overpowering desire to get her on deck again, my mad impatience to commit the fatal act, became once more too strong to be controlled.

'We shall be cooler on deck,' I said. 'Let us take the bag up there.'

She showed wonderful courage. I could almost see the cry for help rising to her lips. She repressed it; she had still presence of mind enough to foresee what might happen before she could rouse the sleeping men.

'We have a light here to count the money

by,' she answered. 'I don't feel at all too warm in the cabin. Let us stay here a little longer. See how Elfie is amusing herself!'

Her eyes rested on me as she spoke. Something in the expression of them quieted me for the time. I was able to pause and think. I might take her on deck by main force, before the men could interfere. But her cries would rouse them; they would hear the splash in the water; and they might be quick enough to rescue us. It would be wiser to wait a little, and trust to my cunning to delude her into leaving the cabin of her own accord. I put the bag back on the table, and began to search for the leather money-case. My hands were strangely clumsy and helpless. I could only find the case, after scattering half the contents of the bag on the table. The child was near me at the time, and noticed what I was doing.

'Oh, how awkward you are!' she burst

out in her frankly fearless way. 'Let me put your bag tidy. Do, please!'

I granted the request impatiently. Elfie's restless desire to be always doing something (instead of amusing me as usual) irritated me now. The interest that I had once felt in the charming little creature was all gone. An innocent love was a feeling that was stifled in the poisoned atmosphere of my mind, that night.

The money I had with me was mostly composed of notes of the Bank of England. I set aside the sum that would probably be required to take a traveller back to London; and I put all that remained into the hands of Mrs. Van Brandt. Could she still suspect me of concealing a design on her life, after that?

'I can communicate with you in the future,' I said, 'through Messrs. Van Brandt of Amsterdam.'

She took the money mechanically. Her hand trembled ; her eyes met mine with a look of piteous entreaty. She tried to revive my old tenderness for her—she made a last appeal to my forbearance and consideration.

'We may part friends,' she said, in low trembling tones. 'And as friends we may meet again, when time has taught you to think forgivingly of what has passed between us to-night!'

She offered me her hand. I looked at her without taking it. Her motive was plain. Still suspecting me, she had tried her last chance of getting safely on shore!

'The less we say of the past the better,' I answered with ironical politeness. 'It is getting late. And you will agree with me that Elfie ought to be in her bed.' I looked round at the child, still busy with both hands in my bag, trying to put it in order. 'Be quick, Elfie!' I said, 'your mamma is going

away.' I opened the cabin door, and offered my arm to Mrs. Van Brandt. 'This boat is my house, for the time being,' I resumed. 'When ladies take leave of me after a visit, I escort them to the deck. Pray take my arm!'

She started back. For the second time, she was on the point of crying for help—and for the second time she kept that last desperate alternative in reserve.

'I havn't seen your cabin yet,' she said; her eyes wild with fear, a forced smile on her lips, as she spoke. 'There are several little things here that interest me. I want another minute or two to look at them.'

She turned away to get nearer to the child, under pretence of looking round the cabin. I stood on guard before the open door, watching her. She made a second pretence—she noisily overthrew a chair, as if by accident, and then waited to discover

whether her trick had succeeded in waking the men. The heavy snoring went on; not a sound of a person moving was audible on either side of us.

'My men are heavy sleepers!' I said, smiling significantly. 'Don't be alarmed! you have not disturbed them. Nothing wakes these Dutch sailors when they are once safe in port.'

She made no reply. My patience was exhausted. I left the door, and advanced towards her. She retreated in speechless terror, passing behind the table, to the end of the cabin. I followed her until she had reached the extremity of the room, and could get no farther. She met the look I fixed on her—she shrank into a corner and called for help. In the deadly terror that possessed her she lost the use of her voice. A low hoarse moaning, hardly louder than a whisper, was all that passed her lips. Already, in

imagination, I stood with her on the gunwale, I felt the cold contact of the water—when I was startled by a cry behind me. I turned round. The cry had come from Elfie. She had apparently just discovered some new object in the bag; she was holding it up in admiration, high above her head. 'Mamma! mamma!' the child cried excitedly, 'look at this pretty thing! Oh, do, do, do ask him if I may have it!'

Her mother ran to her, eager to seize the poorest excuse for getting away from me. I followed; I stretched out my hands to seize her. She suddenly turned round on me, a woman transformed! A bright flush was on her face; an eager wonder sparkled in her eyes. Snatching Elfie's coveted object out of the child's hand, she held it up before me. I saw it under the lamp-light. It was my little forgotten keepsake—the Green Flag.

'How came you by this?' she asked, in

breathless anticipation of my reply. Not the slightest trace was left in her face of the terror that had convulsed it barely a minute since! 'How came you by this?' she repeated, seizing me by the arm and shaking me, in the ungovernable impatience that possessed her.

My head turned giddy; my heart beat furiously under the conflict of emotions that she had roused in me. My eyes were riveted on the green flag. The words that I wanted to speak were words that refused to come to me. I answered mechanically, 'I have had it since I was a boy.'

She dropped her hold on me, and lifted her hands with a gesture of ecstatic gratitude. A lovely angelic brightness flowed like light from heaven over her face. For one moment, she stood enraptured. The next, she clasped me passionately to her bosom,

and whispered in my ear, 'I am Mary Dermody—I made it for You!'

The shock of discovery, following so closely on all that I had suffered before it, was too much for me. I sank, and fainted in her arms.

When I came to myself, I was lying on my bed in the cabin. Elfie was playing with the green flag; and Mary was sitting by me with my hand in hers. One long look of love passed silently from her eyes to mine—from mine to hers. In that look, the kindred spirits were united again; the Two Destinies were fulfilled.

THE END OF THE STORY.

THE FINALE.

THE WIFE WRITES, AND CLOSES THE STORY.

THE PRELUDE to 'The Two Destinies' began with a little narrative, which you may have forgotten by this time.

The narrative was written by myself—a citizen of The United States, visiting England with his wife. It described a dinner-party, at which we were present, given by Mr. and Mrs. Germaine in celebration of their marriage; and it mentioned the circumstances under which we were entrusted with the Story which has just come to an end in these pages. Having read the manuscript, it was left to us (as you may now remember) to decide whether we should continue our friendly

intercourse with Mr. and Mrs. Germaine, or not.

At three o'clock, P.M. we closed the last leaf of the story. Five minutes later I sealed it up in its cover, my wife put her bonnet on—and there we were, bound straight for Mr. Germaine's house, when the servant brought a letter into the room addressed to my wife.

She opened it—looked at the signature—and discovered that it was 'Mary Germaine.' Seeing this, we sat down, side by side, to read the letter before we did anything else.

On reflection, it strikes me that you may do well to read it too. Mrs. Germaine is surely, by this time, a person in whom you feel some interest. And she is, on that account as I think, the fittest person to close the Story. Here is her letter:

'Dear Madam—or, may I say, dear friend?—be prepared, if you please, for a

little surprise. When you read these lines, we shall have left London on our way to the Continent.

'After you went away last night, my husband decided on taking this journey. Seeing how keenly he felt the insult offered to me by the ladies whom we had asked to our table, I willingly agreed to our sudden departure. When Mr. Germaine is far away from his false friends, my experience of him tells me that he will recover his tranquillity. That is enough for me.

'My little daughter goes with us of course. Early this morning, I drove to the school in the suburbs at which she is being educated, and took her away with me. It is needless to say that she was delighted at the prospect of travelling. She shocked the school-mistress by waving her hat over her head, and crying "Hooray!" like a boy.

The good lady was very careful to inform me that my daughter could not possibly have learnt to cry "Hooray," in *her* house.

'You have probably by this time read the narrative which I committed to your care. I hardly dare ask how I stand in your estimation now. Is it possible that I might have seen you and your good husband, if we had not left London so suddenly? As things are, I must tell you in writing, what I should infinitely have preferred saying to you, with your friendly hand in mine.

'Your knowledge of the world has, no doubt, already attributed the absence of the ladies at our dinner-table to some report affecting my character. You are quite right. While I was taking Elfie away from her school, my husband called on one of his friends who dined with us (Mr. Waring), and insisted on an explanation. Mr. Waring referred him to the woman who is known to

you, by this time, as Mr. Van Brandt's lawful wife. In her intervals of sobriety, she possesses some musical talent; Mrs. Waring had met with her at a concert for a charity; and had been interested in the story of her "wrongs," as she called them. My name was of course mentioned. I was described as "a cast-off mistress of Van Brandt," who had persuaded Mr. Germaine into disgracing himself by marrying her, and becoming the step-father of her child. Mrs. Waring thereupon communicated what she had heard to other ladies who were her friends. The result you saw for yourselves when you dined at our house.

'I inform you of what has happened without making any comment. Mr. Germaine's narrative has already told you that I foresaw the deplorable consequences which might follow our marriage, and that I over and over again (God knows at what cost of

misery to myself), refused to be his wife. It was only when my poor little green flag had revealed us to each other, that I lost all control over myself. The old time on the banks of the lake came back to me; my heart hungered for its darling of happier days; and I said Yes, when I ought, as you may think, to have still said No. Will you take poor old Dame Dermody's view of it—and believe that the kindred spirits once re-united, could be parted no more? Or will you take my view, which is simpler still? I do love him so dearly; and he is so fond of me!

'In the meantime, our departure from England seems to be the wisest course that we can adopt. As long as this woman lives, she will say again of me, what she has said already, whenever she can find the opportunity. My child might hear the reports about her mother, and might be injured by

them when she gets older. We propose to take up our abode, for a time at least, in the neighbourhood of Naples. Here, or farther away yet, we may hope to live without annoyance, among a people whose social law is the law of mercy. Whatever may happen, we have always one last consolation to sustain us—we have love.

'You talked of travelling on the Continent, when you dined with us. If you should wander our way, the English consul at Naples is a friend of my husband's, and he will have our address. I wonder whether we shall ever meet again? It does seem hard to charge the misfortunes of my life on me, as if they were my faults.

'Speaking of my misfortunes, I may say before I close this letter, that the man to whom I owe them, is never likely to cross my path again. The Van Brandts of Amsterdam have received certain information

that he is now on his way to New Zealand. They are determined to prosecute him, if he returns. He is little likely to give them the opportunity.

'The travelling-carriage is at the door—I must say good-bye. My husband sends to you both his kindest regards and best wishes. His manuscript will be quite safe (when you leave London) if you send it to his bankers at the address enclosed. Think of me sometimes—and think of me kindly. I appeal confidently to *your* kindness, for I don't forget that you kissed me at parting. Your grateful friend (if you will let her be your friend),

'MARY GERMAINE.'

We are rather impulsive people in the United States; and we decide on long journeys by sea or land, without making the slightest fuss about it. My wife and I looked at each

other, when we had read Mrs. Germaine's letter.

'London is dull,' I remarked—and waited to see what came of it.

My wife read my remark the right way directly.

'Suppose we try Naples?' she said.

That is all. Permit us to wish you good-bye. We are off to Naples.

THE END.

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Cost	Original binding or covers
✓Edition	Presentation
Fine binding	✓Searcity
Format	Subject

Eas

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